South Haven Tribune

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February 8, 2026

SH council OKs bonds for ice rink project

By JULIE NEWELL
SH Tribune Editor

SOUTH HAVEN — The South Haven City Council approved bonds and trade-partner bids this week for the four seasons pavilion and ice rink downtown.

As part of the ice rink improvements, the city council previously approved an intent to issue bonds for the project.

"The DDA has asked for bonding for their project up to $2 million for ice rink improvements," City Manager Kate Hosier said.

The city recently received a savings report from the city's financial consultants at MFCI, Inc., which shows refunding portions of the prior bonds issued in 2013 may provide a savings in interests costs to the city and the Downtown Development Authority.

MFCI and bond council recommended refunding all or a portion of the prior bonds if the city is able to achieve a net savings of debt service costs.

This authorizes general obligation limited tax bonds for the ice rink project and refunding all or a portion of the prior bonds.

The ice rink project would add improvements to the city's ice skating rink facility, including the design, acquisition and construction of a concrete pad with in-pad cooling system, asphalt paving and resurfacing around the pad, installation of elevated steel-framed structure, relocation of chiller and pump to the structure, demolition, site amenities and related facilities.

The city council also approved the trade-partner bid results as recommended by the city's construction management company, Wolverine Building Group, for the project which includes resurfacing the adjacent parking lot.

Wolverine conducted a bidding process for the applicable trade-partners' scope of work in accordance with project and city requirements. Bids were evaluated based on cost, completeness, contractor qualifications and the ability to meet project schedule and performance requirements.

The trade-partner bid results totaled $800,905 (excluding materials testing) including:

■ Surveying: Feenstra for $5,300

■ Concrete: Burgess for

See **ICE RINK**, page A3

Julie Newell / Tribune file photo

The Huron Street Pavilion is used as an ice rink in downtown South Haven every winter and is set to get several updates with construction beginning in early spring.

Photos provided / South Haven Area Emergency Services

South Haven Area Emergency Services were called Sunday for a report of a person who fell while on the Lake Michigan ice shelf about 100 yards offshore in South Haven. The person suffered a leg injury and was transported to shore on a gurney.

An ice rescue

Individual rescued after falling through ice shelf in SH

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — South Haven Area Emergency Services were called to the beach for an ice rescue Sunday afternoon for an individual who had fallen into Lake Michigan.

According to a news release from SHAES, first responders were told one person fell while on the Lake Michigan ice shelf about 100 yards offshore at about 3 p.m. Sunday just off the city's South Beach.

The person suffered a leg injury and was transported to shore on a gurney.

The injured person was taken by ambulance to an area hospital.

SHAES officials said this is the second incident of this kind this winter, and are reminding city residents and visitors to stay off Lake Michigan ice shelves and pier heads.

Police were also called to the South Haven beach last weekend to guide people away from the pier head after they were seen walking on the ice shelf.

South Haven Area Emergency Services were called to the beach for an ice rescue Sunday afternoon for an individual who had fallen into Lake Michigan.

"Inland lakes or inland ponds they'll get three, four, five inches of ice on them and they're safe to walk on after you hit five, six inches of ice because it's solid," South Haven Fire Chief Brandon Hinz said.

"The waves that form in Lake Michigan, a lot of that stuff will get blown in and then with the waves constantly hitting all those shelves, they'll undermine

See **RESCUE**, page A3

SH reduces public comment time amid new procedures

Council members agree to social contract after two incidents

By JULIE NEWELL
SH Tribune Editor

SOUTH HAVEN — The South Haven City Council held a special meeting Monday to discuss a social contract and rules of procedures council members are expected to follow.

During the meeting, no changes were made to the contract and the city council approved it.

The social contract was made to guide current and future council members on how to behave during meetings and debates and was adopted by the city council in December.

This stemmed from the city council wanting a code of conduct after two incidents occurred during the city council meetings in 2024 and 2025.

An ad hoc committee was formed to create the code of conduct and City Attorney Dave Eberle presented the draft during the Nov. 17, 2025 special meeting. After more discussion, city council asked to have the document pared down before it was approved.

Rules and procedures

The city council adopted new rules of procedure for the city council during Monday's meeting.

"It largely relies on

See **MEETING**, page A3

SH council introduces zoning map amendment

By JULIE NEWELL
SH Tribune Editor

SOUTH HAVEN — The South Haven City Council introduced the first reading of an ordinance to amend the city's zoning map.

The amendment would rezone 285 Black River St. from an R-1B single-family district to an R-2 single and two-family residential district.

According to city documents, the applicant would like to develop the property into multi-family condominiums in the future. However, there is no current site plan for the development.

"I love the opportunity it could bring to have some missing middle housing," Council Member Dave Flack said. "Now, how that manifests, we'll see. But it was encouraging to see that and I hope that will come through."

The amendment introduction was approved for a first reading and will be voted on for adoption at a future city council meeting.

Other items

The city council approved the donation of an acknowledgement sign for Avery Park.

"The city was approached by Ruth and Ron Wiser, (who) live adjacent to the Avery Park over on the north side," City Manager Kate Hosier said. "They have been maintaining the park and

See **COUNCIL**, page A2

The Tribune: Celebrating Our 127th Year

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BRONSON

OBITUARIES

Sheldon Waxman

April 22, 1941 – Feb. 3, 2026

Sheldon "Shelly" Robert Waxman, age 84, passed away on Feb. 3, 2026, following a long and courageous battle with dementia.

Shelly was born on April 22, 1941, in Chicago, Ill., to Henri and Anna (Sokolsky) Waxman.

He lived in Chicago for over 30 years, attending South Shore High School and the University of Illinois before earning his JD from DePaul University College of Law in 1965.

His legal career began as an Assistant U.S. Attorney in Chicago (1971–1974), later moving to South Haven, Mich., where he was active in the community and maintained a private law practice for 40 years. Shelly was a dedicated advocate for individual freedoms and the rights of the "little guy" against government overreach.

He was also an accomplished author, publishing both fiction and nonfiction books inspired by his legal cases. His memoirs and case information are permanently housed at the University of Kansas, Kenneth Spencer Research Library.

For the past 10 years, Shelly resided in the Keego Harbor and West Bloomfield, Mich. communities.

A lifelong sports enthusiast, Shelly swam and played football in high school, worked as a lifeguard at his family cottage at Mt. Pleasant subdivision in South Haven, and completed the Chicago Marathon multiple times. He was a long-time Michigan State University football season ticket holder and a frequent supporter of Spartan basketball.

Shelly was a loving grandparent who took great pride in his family.

He is survived by his wife, Katherine; his son, Josiah (Jessica); his daughter, Zoe (Cliff) Bracey; and his three grandchildren, Julia, Maeve, and Clifford.

He was preceded in death by his parents and his brother, Ronald.

A private family services was held at The Dorfman Chapel in Farmington Hills, Mich., on Feb. 6.

Donations in Shelly's memory may be made to the Jewish Hospice and Chaplaincy Network and PACE Southeast Michigan.

The family expresses their appreciation to the caregivers at PACE SE Michigan, Comfort Cove West Bloomfield, the Jewish Hospice and Chaplaincy Network and the Danto Health Care Center for their support over the past two years.

DEATH NOTICE

Paula Kathleen (Martin) Schultz

Paula Kathleen (Martin) Schultz, 87, of Holland, Mich., died Tuesday, Jan. 20, 2026. Arrangements are by Dykstra Funeral Homes – Downtown Chapel. To sign an online registry or leave a memory please visit www.dykstrafuneralhome.com.

Bird-flipping driver pleads guilty to 'brake checking' Border Patrol van

By CHARLES E. RAMIREZ
The Detroit News (TNS)

A Michigan motorist accused of flipping off federal agents and cutting off a Border Patrol van has pleaded guilty to charges, according to court records.

Jacob Nathaniel Len, 30, of Ypsilanti, entered the plea last month in U.S. District Court in Detroit, court documents said.

The filings also said he was sentenced to six months of probation, to pay a $5,000 fine, to participate in a mental health treatment program, and to perform 40 hours of community service.

Reached Tuesday, Len's attorney, Matthew Vicari, said he and his client had no comment on the plea or the sentence.

However, in a sentencing memo submitted to the court on Len's behalf, Vicari said his client has no criminal history and the offense he's accused of "is an aberration in (his) otherwise law-abiding life."

"Mr. Len recognizes that brake checking another vehicle on a highway, as alleged by the government, is inherently dangerous," the memo said. "Mr. Len agrees that this type of conduct could result in harm to himself and to others."

The defendant was charged in August with assaulting, resisting, or impeding certain officers and employees, a felony. The crime's penalty is 20 years in federal prison.

Authorities allege that on July 7, the defendant was driving a black BMW sedan on westbound Interstate 96 when he confronted four Border Patrol agents in a van transporting 15 immigrants to the North Lake Correctional Facility east of Ludington.

Officials said Len moved his car in front of the agent's van, stepped on his brakes, and stuck his hand with his middle finger extended through his car's sunroof. They said the defendant brake-checked the CBP van a second time then drove away.

"The alleged actions of this man are shameful," U.S. Attorney Jerome Gorgon said in a statement after Len was charged. "While zipping around in his BMW, this defendant cavalierly endangered the hardworking agents who put their lives on the line every day protecting our country, the illegal aliens they were tasked with safely transporting, and other drivers going about their lives."

Cheyvoryea Gibson, special agent in charge of the FBI Detroit field office, said in a statement: "The alleged actions by Jacob Len were not only reckless, but endangered lives and compromised public safety."

Folk duo Payton and Annabelle to perform in SH

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — Folk duo Payton and Annabelle will present a concert of beautiful harmonies and unique interpretations of pop classics in South Haven on Feb. 13.

According to a news release, the performance will take place at 3 p.m. at First Congregational UCC as part of their Winter Concert Series.

"Payton and Annabelle are a dynamic duo blending folk and alternative genres, characterized by rich harmonies and intricate acoustic guitar arrangements," the release stated.

Photo provided

Folk duo Payton and Annabelle will perform on Feb. 13 at First Congregational UCC as part of their Winter Concert Series.

Their musical partnership started at The Kalamazoo Academy of Rock band program in 2021, where a shared love for artists like Simon and Garfunkel and Taylor Swift ignited their creative spark.

"Having won the New Moon Songwriting competition, the Kalamazoo Battle of the Bands, and opened for notable touring artists including Sarah Jarosz and Kaia Kater, the two are a force to be reckoned with, with something musical for everyone to enjoy," the release stated.

Payton and Annabelle will share new music as well as songs by Simon and Garfunkel, James Taylor, The Beegees and ABBA.

Tickets for the Payton and Annabelle concert are $20 at the door and free for children 12 and under.

For more information, call 269-637-3804 (opt. 5).

For more information about Payton and Annabelle's music at linktr.ee/paytonandannabelle.

As school cellphone bans gain popularity, lawmakers say it's time to go bell-to-bell

By ROBBIE SEQUEIRA
Stateline.org (TNS)

The momentum behind cellphone bans in schools has reached more than half the states, as teachers, superintendents and education experts praise these policies as a way to boost student achievement and mental health, and to rebuild a sense of community that many believe has been diminished by students' addiction to screens.

Now, the question for many states and school districts isn't whether to remove distracting devices from students each day, but for how long.

States that have passed laws requiring some kind of cellphone policy now are considering going further and mandating daylong bans, even for high schoolers. The idea has gotten some pushback from students, but also from teachers and parents who say strict bell-to-ban bans aren't necessary. Some say they worry about safety in the event of a school shooting or other emergency.

Education experts say the modern push for school phone bans accelerated after the pandemic reshaped how students use technology and interrupted crucial in-person experiences in a classroom. Kara Stern, director of education and engagement for SchoolStatus, a data-collecting firm that assists K-12 districts with attendance and other school issues, said smartphones shifted from being tools of connection during remote learning to sources of isolation once students returned to classrooms.

"During remote learning, phones became a primary way kids entertained themselves and stayed connected," Stern said. "But once schools reopened, phones stopped being a connection tool and started creating disconnection."

Currently, 38 states and Washington, D.C., have enacted some form of statewide restriction or requirement for districts to limit student phone use. Of those, roughly 18 states and the district have full-day bans or comprehensive statewide restrictions (including during classroom and noninstructional time).

Despite widespread adoption of school cellphone restrictions and support for them, compliance remains uneven, according to a 2025 University of Southern California study. Most students continue to use phones during the school day regardless of restrictions, the researchers found.

Still, more than half of teens surveyed said enforcement this school year is stricter than it was the previous year.

"Teaching a class where students are on their phones is like trying to teach at Disney World over a loudspeaker," Stern said. "The environment just isn't designed for learning."

Jim Watson / AFP via Getty Images / TNS

Eighth-grader Ja' Nae Dorsey, right, unlocks her cell phone pouch after school followed by her twin sister La' Mae Dorsey, left, and 7th-grader Hayden Jones at Mark Twain Middle School in Alexandria, Virginia, on March 6.

Pushing for broader bans

Georgia is among the states considering a bell-to-bell policy for all public high schools. This comes a year after Republican Gov. Brian Kemp signed a ban for K-8 grades.

Students are paying attention. At East Paulding High School in Dallas, Georgia, students and teachers offered mixed views on cellphone bans. On a student-run news broadcast aired last fall, some students expressed concern over their safety, while some teachers were bullish on the idea that a ban would be effective at the high school level.

Republican state Rep. Scott Hilton, who proposed the new law, told the Georgia Recorder that the ban for younger students helped families get used to a bell-to-bell ban.

"I've just been blown away at the positive reaction across the board from all different constituencies, teachers, administrators, parents and even in a lot of cases, students who have experienced a difference and said, 'Oh, wow, I kind of like this,'" Hilton said.

Several states focus their bans on prohibiting cellphone use "during instructional time," which wouldn't necessarily include free time such as lunch. Kansas lawmakers are pushing ahead on a ban on use during instructional time; it would supersede previous action that allowed local district discretion on cellphone use in schools. Michigan legislators passed a similar bill last month; it was sent to Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer on Monday.

Similar instruction time bills passed in Iowa, North Carolina and Wisconsin last year. In Oregon, Democratic Gov. Tina Kotek issued an executive order in July requiring every district to adopt bell-to-bell cellphone bans by Jan. 1. Several districts have said the mandate has gone better than expected, with some superintendents saying they've seen more interaction among students.

Bell-to-bell cellphone restrictions are being considered or advanced in Massachusetts and Pennsylvania, and were recently enacted in New York. The Massachusetts bill goes further than most, adding smartphones, tablets and Bluetooth devices to its list of banned electronic devices.

Most legislation reviewed by Stateline includes exceptions to the bans for students with special needs and in cases of emergency.

School shootings in 2025 fell to the lowest number since 2020, according to a review by Education Week. Still, there were 18 shootings that left seven people dead last year, the review found.

In Georgia, state Superintendent Richard Woods, a Republican, told reporters he's heard firsthand from survivors of a shooting there about the importance of having cellphones on hand for safety reasons.

"Do I support this? Absolutely," Woods said, referring to the cellphone ban. "But I think we have to find a sweet spot and not move to the extremes."

What works best?

According to a Pew Research Center poll released last summer, 74 percent of U.S. adults support banning cellphones during class for middle and high school students, up from 68 percent in fall 2024. Far fewer adults (19 percent) oppose classroom bans, and 7 percent are unsure, the poll found.

For advocates of a phone-free education, the gold standard of cellphone policies is a bell-to-bell restriction with inaccessible storage for the device.

A 2025 article in JAMA Pediatrics reported that teens ages 13-18 spend an average of 90 minutes on their phones during school, but that little has been written about what students are doing during that time.

"Although 99.7 percent of US public school principals report their school has a smartphone policy, few studies have objectively examined smartphone app usage during school," an abstract of the study reads.

Kim Whitman, a co-head of Smartphone Free Childhood US, said she saw the effects of a "consistent bell-to-bell" policy firsthand with her own son. When his phone broke in eighth grade, he dreaded going to school without it. But after his first day, he came home and told Whitman that he played soccer at recess, met new classmates and had "a really good day" – one he said was better than usual.

Whitman and other education experts believe cellphone bans will mirror past public health reversals – like banning smoking in schools – and possibly redefine what it means to be in a classroom post-pandemic.

"Today we can't imagine allowing smoking in schools," Whitman said. "I think in five to 10 years we'll say the same thing about cellphones – wondering how we ever allowed them into classrooms."

Whitman, who has examined and graded states according to the efficacy of their cellphone bans, said that North Dakota and Rhode Island are the only states warranting high marks for their adoption and enforcement of bell-to-bell policies.

Despite claims from adults who love the phone-free policies, students aren't as convinced. Only 41 percent of teens support cellphone bans in middle and high school classrooms, according to polling by Pew Research Center released in January.

The largest share of teens who like certain phone-free policies are in schools where the policy allows phones during noninstructional time throughout the day, according to the USC study.

Stateline is part of States Newsroom, a national nonprofit news organization focused on state policy. Visit at stateline.org.

Al-Van Humane Society

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73303 8th Ave. PO Box 421 South Haven, MI 49090
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Mon, Tue, Thurs, Fri 11 am to 5:30 pm; Sat 11 am to 3 pm; Wed, Sun Closed

Meet our Pet of the Week, Mickey!

Oh Mickey, you're so fine … he's so fine he'll blow your mind! Meet Mickey, our undefeated king of parkour. This young, bouncy boy loves to jump, run, and show off his athletic skills. He can be a little timid at first, but give him a hot dog or some cheese and you'll have a new best friend in no time.

Mickey is house trained, good with kids, and gets along well with other dogs. He's eager to learn and just needs a patient human to help him polish his manners. When he's not bouncing around, Mickey loves to lounge and soak up the good life – so whether you're looking for a walking partner or a couch buddy, he's your guy.

Come meet Mickey and see why he's so fine for yourself!

Fur Ball 2026

Fur Ball 2026 is almost here. Join Al-Van Humane Society on February 21st for Breakfast at Tiffany's, a glamorous evening inspired by Audrey Hepburn herself. Enjoy dinner, a cash bar, live and silent auctions, and a high-energy dueling piano show, all in support of homeless pets. Tickets are limited, so don't wait. Get yours now at al-van.org/furball and be part of one of the most anticipated nights of the season.

THIS WEEK'S WISH LIST

Purina dry dog, puppy, and kitten food

COUNCIL

From page A1

assisting with its landscaping for over 25 years. They are asking to have an acknowledgement sign, that they would have made, that would be similar to the existing signage."

The additional sign will be added to the existing sign.

The city council approved a full-time electrical engineer position within the Department of Public Works.

City council approved one-year commercial use license agreements for four vendors including:

- My Barefoot Wedding
- Bend Yoga
- Sincerely K&J
- Easy Beach Chairs & Cabanas

City council also approved four special events including:

- The South Haven Art Fair, to be held July 2-5 in Stanley Johnston Park.
- The South Haven Steelheaders Pro/Am Tournament, to be held May 15-17 at the Southside Municipal Marina.
- Worship on the Riverwalk 2026, to be held from 7-8:15 p.m. each Sunday beginning July 12-26 at Riverfront Park.
- Salute to Veterans to be held at noon on Aug. 15 at the South Haven Harbor.

Contact: jnewell@southhaventribune.com, 269-637-1104

SHAES reports record year for emergency responses in 2025

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — South Haven Area Emergency Services continued a trend of increased responses, particularly medical related, during 2025.

According to a news release, the department marked its 29th year of service to the city of South Haven and the townships of Casco, Geneva and South Haven.

The department's annual report revealed, for the 12th consecutive year, the number of calls has increased from the previous year to a record of 2,920 incidents. The previous record, set in 2024, was 2,699. It was the greatest increase in call volume from year-to-year. A decade ago in 2015 the call volume was 2,183.

Four new career members were welcomed to the department and a firefighter and two cadets were added to the paid-on-call roster. Firefighter/paramedic Brian Montgomery was promoted to captain.

The department is comprised of 22 full-time staff and 31 paid-on-call firefighters protecting 97 square miles of land and several miles of Lake Michigan shoreline from three stations. The department has 22 members who are licensed EMT-paramedics, one EMT- advanced, 12 EMT-basic, one emergency medical responder, eight Cadets and 21 who are certified firefighter instructors.

"Our people are the foundation of SHAES," Executive Director Brandon Hinz said in the release. "The continued growth, development and transition within our ranks reflect both opportunity and the natural evolution of a strong organization."

Hinz said the annual requirements for Fire and EMS continuing education take a considerable amount of time, but are necessary in order to keep members' skills honed.

Retiring after distinguished service were Lieutenants Dustin Guminski (25 years) and Mark Kaput (25 years), FF Patrick Quinn (17 years) and FF/Paramedic David Griessel (12 years).

In 2025 there were 2,021 calls on the medical side compared to 1,851 in 2024. In 2015, medical calls numbered 1,704. In 2025, 1,138 of the medical responses required Advance Life Support services.

Last year there were 1,204 calls in the city of South Haven, followed by South Haven township 815, Casco township 470 and Geneva township 378. Emergency services provided mutual aid to other fire departments and EMS agencies on 53 occasions.

Property losses from fire in 2025 dropped to $524,473compared to $812,050 the year before. Losses by governmental unit were city of South Haven, $271,273, South Haven township, $112,000, Casco township, $95,220, and Geneva township, $46,000. By comparison, the property saved from fire loss during the responses total totaled $13,800,000.

"In 2025, we continued strengthening both individual staff skills and specialized response capabilities," Hinz said. "The SHAES' West Side Rope Rescue Team was established and the SHAES Dive Team saw increased participation and continued growth."

The department continued its inspection program which made 2,496 contacts, including 816 short-term rental and 95 food vendor fire safety inspections during the year. In partnership with the American Red Cross and state-sponsored MI Prevention program, the staff installed 280 smoke/carbon monoxide alarms throughout the community free of charge.

"This is an on-going service provided to our community," Hinz said. "A simple phone call to 269-639-1496 will results in the service being provided."

Free smoke alarm sign-ups have also been posted at area schools and Van Buren Senior Services.

There were no civilian fire-related deaths in 2025. There were three emergency incidents in which responders were injured requiring medical attention.

The National Fire Protection Association sets a benchmark goal of eight minutes for fire/EMS responses to an incident. This is from the time of dispatch to the arrival on the scene of the incident by the first unit.

South Haven emergency services during 2025 had an average response time of five minutes, 48 seconds. The average response time by unit of government: city of South Haven, 4:07; South Haven township, 5:09, Geneva township, 6:52; and Casco township, 7:02. The department bolstered personnel presence at its township stations to improve response times.

Recognitions awarded during the year included FF/EMT Ronald Wise, Firefighter of the Year and Training Officer Shawn Smith, Leadership Award.

Department members presented the fire safety message to more than 1,100 kids at local schools and sponsored its 25th annual Fire Safety Fun Fair. The department also participated in the city-sponsored Touch-a-Truck event. Two successful pancake breakfasts brought the community together while supporting department initiatives.

"Community risk reduction and public engagement remain central to our mission," Hinz said. "Through prevention programs and events, we strive to build strong relationships while improving public safety."

The department's Honor Guard participated in several community events including the annual Salute to Veterans and a 9/11 Vigil at the downtown Firefighters Memorial. The name of deceased Fire Chief Sherman (Sherm) Dykstra was added to the Michigan Firefighter Memorial.

Three new off-road response trucks were put into service and an order was placed for a custom-built fireboat that will enhance the department's ability to respond to emergencies on Lake Michigan and surrounding waterways.

Donations from local and regional organizations, along with fund-raising efforts, funded the purchase of new battery-powered extrication equipment.

Photos provided / Tom Renner

South Haven Area Emergency Services participate in turnout gear and SCBA inspections.

The Fire Safety Fun Fair is an annual event hosted by South Haven Area Emergency Services that allows kids to learn about fire safety in a fun way.

South Haven Area Emergency Services firefighters are participating in an agricultural rescue demonstration.

RESCUE

From page A1

a lot of that ice. They create big void areas, hollow areas and you have no idea what's underneath your feet and that's what makes it so dangerous."

The pier at South Haven's South Beach can be dangerous in the winter for this very reason.

Hinz said South Haven Area Emergency Services has special training, suits and equipment for cold water rescues.

"We have cold water rescue suits that we wear to go out to try to rescue somebody, but if these shelves keep extending further and further out, which they usually do, we're limited on how far we can go out with that equipment on, so it's scary," Hinz said.

ICE RINK

From page A1

$213,130

■ Plumbing and mechanical: Quality Air for $251,635

■ Excavation: Topland for $134,175

■ Asphalt: Black Gold for $196,665

The total project cost accountants for allowances, contingencies, engineering, construction management and oversight, bonding and other items.

The post bid estimate for the total project cost is $1.6 million, which is below the original budget estimate and well below the noticed bonding limit.

The project is on schedule for early spring construction subject to weather, bonding and completion of final project agreements.

Contact: jnewell@southhaventribune.com, 269-637-1104

South Haven job fair to offer seasonal and new positions

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — The City of South Haven and South Haven Area Emergency Services will host a job fair on Feb. 28.

According to a news release, the event will be held from noon until 2 p.m. in the council chambers inside City Hall, located at 539 Phoenix Street, South Haven, MI 49090.

The city is recruiting seasonal positions such as parking enforcement, beach enforcement, parks/cemetery workers, bridge tenders, marina staff and new this year, lifeguards.

Emergency services is recruiting new members for their paid-on-call staff and cadet program.

Human Resources Director Kim Wise said in the release that this is the fourth year the city has hosted a job fair.

"This is the fourth year we have hosted the job fair and each year we have approximately 50 candidates who participate in on-the-spot interviews," Wise said. "This has been a successful way for us to reach and interview a large group of candidates in a short period of time."

Starting pay for dock hands and customer service staff at city marinas is $14 per hour and candidates must be 15 years or older.

Most other positions at the city have a starting pay of $15.50 per hour and those positions require that the candidate be 18 years or older.

The new lifeguard positions have a starting pay of $20 per hour and require the candidate to be a high school graduate as of 2026 or earlier.

Starting pay for the paid-on-call firefighters is $20.67 per hour and candidates must be 18 years or older.

"Seasonal positions are ideal for anyone looking for a pathway to a full-time role with the city, or for retirees, adults or students looking for fun and meaningful summertime work," Wise said.

Emergency services will also be promoting its cadet program at the job fair which will enable 16 to 17-year-old prospects to become members of the department and to serve the community.

Starting pay for cadets is $15.23 per hour.

The city clerk will be available during the job fair to register citizens to vote and to provide information on how citizens can apply for a paid election worker position, run for city council or apply for a city board, authority or commission.

If a resident cannot attend the job fair, they can complete an application online at www.southhavenmi.gov/human_resources or www.shaes.org.

For more information, contact Wise at kwise@southhavenmi.gov or 269-637-0749.

South Haven offers Valentine's Day date night bundle

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — Visit South Haven recently announced a Valentine's Day Date Night Bundle in partnership with local lodging partners.

According to a news release, the bundle will be available from Feb. 12 through 15 in the greater South Haven area.

"There is something wonderful about seeing South Haven filled with couples in love," Executive Director of Visit South Haven Jennifer Sistrunk said in the release. "South Haven's Valentine's Day Date Night Bundle is the perfect excuse to turn Valentine's Day into a cozy weekend getaway."

Visit South Haven is partnering with local lodging partners to provide guests a $60 value in local attractions and dining during their Valentine's Day weekend stay.

When travelers book a stay with one of the six participating lodging partners, they will receive two ice skating passes with skate rentals to the South Haven Ice Rink, two movie tickets to the Michigan Theatre and a $25 dining voucher to be used at a local restaurant as part of the Dine on Us program.

Participating lodging partners include: Carriage House at the Harbor, Historic Hotel Nichols, Inn at the Park Bed and Breakfast, Martha's Vineyard Bed and Breakfast, Shores Vacation Rentals and Victoria Resort and Bed & Breakfast.

Representing both South Haven and Van Buren County at large, Visit South Haven represents and supports local lodging partners through efforts to bring additional tourism to the area.

"As a community partner, Visit South Haven uses their funds to support community enhancement projects that make their hometown a better place to live, play and work for locals and visitors alike," the release stated.

For more information, go to southhaven.org.

MEETING

From page A1

Robert's Rules of Order newly revised, so that would govern, except where we have specified otherwise," Eberle said.

One of the rules that was discussed during the meeting included changing the public comment time from five minutes to three minutes.

"I am not in support of making this change at a special meeting, despite being noticed, because of it changing the public's amount of time to speak," Council Member Mary Hosley said. "Also changing the amount of time for their elected officials to speak, contrary to Robert's Rules of Order. I think that this type of change should be held at a regular meeting that is televised."

Other rules included:

■ Once a motion is made and seconded, the chair shall state the question and inquire as to whether there is any debate. Any time spent answering a member's question shall count toward the member's time. Rights in regard to debate are not transferable.

■ The member who made the motion shall be afforded priority in debate followed by the member who seconded the motion.

■ For main motions, a member may not speak longer than five minutes on the same question unless the member obtains the consent of the body.

■ For debatable motions other than main motions, a member may not speak longer than five minutes on the same question unless the member obtains the consent of the body.

■ A member may not speak more than twice on the same question unless the member obtains the consent of the body.

■ Consent of the body under this rule may be given by unanimous consent or by means of a motion to extend debate.

Contact: jnewell@southhaventribune.com, 269-637-1104

South Haven Tribune

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Classified Desk: 1-855-317-4292

Hours: Monday - Friday 9am-2pm EST

0100 ANNOUNCEMENTS

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0900 LEGALS

City of Bangor Board of Review Organizational Meeting, Tuesday March 3rd at 8:30 am

Appeal Hearings - Monday, March 9th 2-5pm and 6-9pm Tuesday, March 10th 9am-Noon Friday, March 13th 9am-Noon

Letters must be received by 4pm March 12th.

Ratios:
Commercial- 45.11% 1.1084
Industrial- 49.11% 1.0181
Residential- 44.92% 1.1130
any others previously listed should be at 50% 1.0000

NOTICE OF MARCH BOARD OF REVIEW
The South Haven Township Board of Review will meet at the South Haven Township Hall, 09761 Blue Star Memorial Hwy, South Haven, MI 49090, on the following dates and times to review property assessments and hear appeals:

Organizational Meeting (No appeals will be heard at this meeting): Tuesday, March 3, 2026, at 2:00 p.m.

Appeal Hearings:
Monday, March 9
* 2:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.
* 6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
Thursday, March 12
* 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
* 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

This meeting provides taxpayers the opportunity to review their property assessments and present appeals to the Board of Review. Taxpayers who are unable to attend in person should contact the Township Office for information on alternate appeal options.

For additional information, contact:
Don Jollay, MAAO
Assessor, South Haven Twp
Office: 269-637-3305
Cell: 815-546-8288
assessor@southhaventwpmi.gov

0900 LEGALS

Frontier provides flat rate residential service in for $25.00-$30.00 and business service for $66.25-$78.00. Other taxes, fees, and surcharges may apply. Frontier offers single party service, touch tone, toll blocking, access to long distance, emergency services, operator assistance, and directory assistance. Use of these services may result in additional charges. Budget or economy services may also be available. Frontier offers Lifeline service which is a nontransferable government assistance program that provides an $8.25 discount on the cost of monthly telephone service or $9.25 on eligible broadband or bundled voice and broadband products (where available) and is limited to one discount per household. There is an additional $2.00 state Lifeline discount available to eligible customers. Customers 65 or older may receive an additional Senior discount of $1.10 per month. In addition to Basic Lifeline, individuals living on federally recognized Tribal Lands who meet the eligibility criteria may also qualify for additional monthly discounts through Enhanced Lifeline and up to $100.00 toward installation fees through the Tribal Link-Up program. You may also qualify for an additional state discount where available.
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2/8/26
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SOUTH HAVEN TRIBUNE

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In The Classifieds!

Notice of 2026 Regular Meeting Schedule
VAN BUREN CONSERVATION DISTRICT BOARD
1035 E Michigan Ave., Paw Paw, MI 49079 269-657-4030 x5

The Van Buren Conservation District Board will meet on the following dates for the 2026 calendar year.
All meetings shall begin at 10:00 AM and shall take place at the USDA Service Center, 1035 E Michigan Ave., Paw Paw, MI 49079. All changes to this schedule shall be posted according to Michigan's Open Meetings Act.

* Wednesday, February 25, 2026 (fourth Wednesday)
* Wednesday, March 25, 2026 (fourth Wednesday)
* Wednesday, April 22, 2026 (fourth Wednesday)
* Wednesday, May 27, 2026 (fourth Wednesday)
* Wednesday, June 24, 2026 (fourth Wednesday)
* Wednesday, July 15, 2026 (third Wednesday to accommodate partner events)
* Wednesday, August 26, 2026 (fourth Wednesday)
* Wednesday, September 23, 2026 (fourth Wednesday)
* Wednesday, October 28, 2026 (fourth Wednesday)
* Wednesday, November 18, 2026 (third Wednesday to accommodate holiday)
* Wednesday, December 16, 2026 (third Wednesday to accommodate holiday)

These are public meetings and may be attended in person. The District Board will provide necessary reasonable accommodations to individuals with disabilities at the meeting upon 1 day's notice. Contact: District Executive Director Emilly Hickmott by phone at 269-633-9054 or by email director@VanBurenCD.org

CITY OF SOUTH HAVEN
Proceedings of the Special City Council Meeting
Council Chambers, City Hall
5:00 p.m. February 2, 2026

THE FOLLOWING ARE NOT APPROVED MEETING MINUTES

Present: Jeff Arnold, Tom Capps, Dave Flack, Mary Hosley, Eddie Polk, Annie Brown

Absent: Letitia Wilkins

Call to Order by Mayor Annie Brown at 5:00 p.m.

Moved by Hosley to excuse Councilmember Wilkins. Seconded by Arnold. Motion was adopted unanimously.

Moved by Polk to approve the agenda. Seconded by Flack. Motion was adopted unanimously.

Public Comment for items on the agenda excluding items scheduled for public hearing was held (Up to 2 minutes).

Moved by Flack to approve a social contract, as written. Seconded by Hosley. Motion was adopted unanimously.

Moved by Flack to approve Resolution 2026-05, a resolution to adopt rules of procedure for the City Council and the City Council Committee of the Whole, as written. Seconded by Arnold. Moved by Polk to amend Section 2.7(c) to limit the time to no more than 5-minutes. Seconded by Capps. Voted Yes: Arnold, Capps, Flack, Polk, Brown. Voted No: Hosley. Motion was adopted. A Roll Call Vote was taken on the amended motion: Voted Yes: Arnold, Capps, Flack, Polk, Brown. Voted No: Hosley. Motion was adopted.

Meeting adjourned by Mayor Brown at 5:15 p.m.

Megan Kiker,
City Clerk

CASCO TOWNSHIP 2026 BOARD OF REVIEW NOTICE
Assessor's Office Casco Township 7104 107th Ave
South Haven MI 49090
BOARD OF REVIEW MEETING SCHEDULE

The Casco Township **BOARD OF REVIEW** for 2026 will be held at the Casco Township Hall, 7104 107th Ave, South Haven Michigan on the following dates and times:
ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING: (No appeals will be heard at this meeting) Tuesday, March 3, 2026, at 1:00 p.m.
APPEAL HEARINGS:
Wed, March 11, 2026, from 9:00a. to 4:00p. (Closed Noon-1p.)
Thurs, March 12, 2026, from 2:00p. to 9:00p. (Closed 5-6p.)
***PLEASE NOTE—Appointments** are encouraged for the Board of Review meetings. To schedule an appointment call Kelly Jellison at 269-591-0289 or email kelly@assessingsolutions.com. A **resident** may protest to the Board of Review by letter. Letter appeals are to be accompanied by a completed Board of Review petition form (form L-4035). All letters of protest must be received by 5:00 p.m., Friday, March 6, 2026. The tentative ratios and the estimated multipliers for each class of real property and personal property for 2026 are as follows:
Agriculture…….44.63…1.12032 **Commercial**……48.82……1.02417
Industrial……..34.46….1.45096 **Residential**…… 43.70……1.14416
Personal Property….50.00…..1.0000

Assessor Contact Information:
Kelly Jellison, Casco Township Assessor
Dated: January 30, 2026
(269)591-0289, kelly@assessingsolutions.com

CITY OF SOUTH HAVEN PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE
CITY COUNCIL

On Monday, March 2, 2026, the City Council for the City of South Haven will hear public comments related to the following request(s). The public hearing(s) will be held at 7:00 P.M. at City Hall, 539 Phoenix Street, South Haven concerning the following:
1. Planned Unit Development Amendment Application-Everett Park/Trailside
Mr. Matt O'Connor has submitted an application to amend the approved Everett Park / Trailside planned unit development at 900 Indiana Ave and 1070 Indiana Ave, located at the southwest corner of the intersection of Elkenburg St and Indiana Ave in the City of South Haven. The proposed amendment will add 16 two-family dwelling units, for a total of 32 dwelling units. The parcel numbers for the referenced addresses are 80-53-240-001-50 and 80-53-260-005-10.
2. Planned Unit Development Application-706 & 712 Virginia Ave
Mr. and Mrs. Michael and Carrie Lynch have submitted an application for planned unit development (PUD) rezoning and approval of a PUD preliminary plan for the properties located at 706 and 712 Virginia Avenue in the City of South Haven. The proposed condominium development would include six single-family dwelling units and a riverfront dock with six boat slips. The parcel numbers for the referenced addresses are 80-53-852-024-00 and 80-53-870-001-01.
Supporting documentation is available for review at the Building Services office, 539 Phoenix Street, South Haven, MI 49090 during normal business hours. Written comments may be submitted in lieu of or in addition to a personal appearance. Written comments must be received no later than 12 p.m. (noon) on Thursday, January 8, 2026. Written comments should be addressed to the City Council and must be submitted to the City Clerk at mkiker@southhavenmi.gov or via postal mail addressed to the City Council and sent to 539 Phoenix Street, South Haven, MI 49090.
Individuals requesting reasonable accommodation for impairments or disabilities should contact the City Clerk no later than five days prior to the public hearing in person at City Hall, at 269-637-0750, or at mkiker@southhavenmi.gov.
Megan Kiker, City Clerk 269)637-0750 mkiker@southhavenmi.gov

Regulatory & Compliance Analyst (Watervliet, MI) Reqs: Bachelor's or Foreign Equivalent in Pharmacy or Pharmaceutical Science or Drug Regulatory Affairs & 1 yr exp as Regulatory & Compliance Analyst. Duties: Ensure adherence to HIPAA, FDA, DEA, CMS, FWA, Medicare & Medicaid regs. Develop, implement & update company policies, SOPs, compliance protocols & workstation procedures. Conduct internal audits, monitor non-compliance & create corrective action plans. Oversee external audits & inspections & prep req'd documentation. Manage PDMP submissions, resolve discrepancies, respond to compliance inquiries & regulatory findings. Review patient complaints, ensure timely adverse drug reporting & collab with pharmacists on MTM services. Maintain CII–CV controlled substance inventory records & implement anti-diversion measures. Monitor regulatory changes through NACDS, FMI, Medicare/Medicaid, DEA, HIPAA, FWA updates & align compliance strategy with company goals. Support business continuity, disaster recovery, strategic planning to strengthen compliance, efficiency & future growth. Salary: $70,000/yr. Benefits: PTO. Mail Resumes to: Watervliet Community Pharmacy LLC, d/b/a Watervliet Community Pharmacy 8593 Red Arrow Hwy, Watervliet, MI 49098

CITY OF SOUTH HAVEN
Proceedings of the Regular City Council Meeting
Council Chambers, City Hall
7:00 p.m. February 2, 2026

THE FOLLOWING ARE NOT APPROVED MEETING MINUTES

Present: Jeff Arnold, Tom Capps, Dave Flack, Mary Hosley, Eddie Polk, Annie Brown

Absent: Letitia Wilkins

Call to Order by Mayor Annie Brown at 7:00 p.m.

Moved by Hosley to excuse Councilmember Wilkins. Seconded by Arnold. Motion was adopted unanimously.

Moved by Arnold to approve the agenda. Seconded by Polk. Motion was adopted unanimously.

Public Comment for items on the agenda excluding items scheduled for public hearing was held (Up to 5 minutes).

Moved by Arnold to approve the Consent Agenda items A-I. Seconded by Flack. A Roll Call Vote was taken: Yes: Arnold, Capps, Flack, Hosley, Polk, Brown. No: None.
A. Council will be asked to approve the City Council Regular minutes from January 5, 2026.
B. Council will be asked to approve the City Council Special meeting minutes from January 9, 2026.
C. Council will be asked to approve invoices totaling $4,131,838.34 for the period ending February 2, 2026, to be approved, and forwarded to the Clerk and Treasurer for payment.
D. Council will be asked to approve invoices totaling $1,123,881.23 for the period ending January 19, 2026, to be approved, and forwarded to the Clerk and Treasurer for payment.
E. Council will be asked to approve $107,038.81, not to exceed $115,000 to TurnKey Network Solutions for the installation of fiberoptic cabling.
F. Council will be asked to receive the General Fund Quarterly Financial Report.
G. Council will be asked to confirm the proposed Mayoral appointments to various boards/commissions.
H. Council will be asked to award the Construction Contract for the Ravines / Beaver Ct. / Michigan & Maple project to Kent Power in the amount of $419,096.95 and approve the purchase of electric materials from Power Line Supply, Irby, and Border States in the amount of $296,528.95 and authorize staff to execute the necessary documents.

I. Council will be asked to acknowledge receipt of the following meeting minutes:
1) June 10, 2025 Parks Commission Regular Meeting minutes;
2) September 17, 2025 Harbor Commission Regular Meeting minutes;
3) October 1, 2025 Downtown Development Authority Regular Meeting minutes;
4) October 14, 2025 Parks Commission Regular Meeting minutes;
5) October 21, 2025 Harbor Commission Regular Meeting minutes;
6) November 5, 2025 Downtown Development Authority Regular Meeting minutes;
7) November 6, 2025 Planning Commission Regular Meeting minutes;
8) November 24, 2025 Zoning Board of Appeals Regular Meeting minutes;
9) December 3, 2025 Downtown Development Authority Workshop Meeting minutes;
10) December 3, 2025 Downtown Development Authority Regular Meeting minutes;
11) December 4, 2025 Planning Commission Regular Meeting minutes.

Moved by Arnold to approve Special Event Applications 2025-50 South Haven Art Fair, 2025-51 South Haven Steelheaders Pro/Am Tournament, 2026-01 Worship on the Riverwalk 2026, & 2026-02 Salute to Veterans. Seconded by Hosley. Motion was adopted unanimously.

Moved by Arnold to approve the 1-year commercial use license agreements with the following entities: My Barefoot Wedding, Bend Yoga, Sincerely K & J, Easy Beach Chairs & Cabanas. Seconded by Flack. Motion was adopted unanimously.

Moved by Flack to approve Resolution 2026-04, a resolution to authorize issuance of Downtown Development and Refunding Bonds. Seconded by Polk. A Roll Call Vote was taken: Yes: Capps, Flack, Hosley, Polk, Arnold, Brown. No: None. Motion was adopted.

Moved by Flack to introduce an ordinance to amend the City of South Haven Zoning Map by rezoning the property commonly known as 285 Black River Street from R-1B Single-Family Residential to R-2 Single and Two-Family Residential. Seconded by Hosley. A Roll Call Vote was taken: Yes: Flack, Arnold, Capps, Brown. No: Hosley, Polk. Motion was adopted.

Moved by Hosley to award the trade-partner bid results, as recommended by Wolverine Building Group, for the Four Seasons Pavilion Project and authorize staff to execute the necessary documents. Seconded by Flack. Motion was adopted unanimously.

Moved by Flack to approve the creation of a new Full-Time Electric Distribution Engineer I/II position within the Department of Public Works and authorize staff to recruit and hire for the position. Seconded by Polk. Motion was adopted unanimously.

City Council received an update from DPW Director Dana Burd.

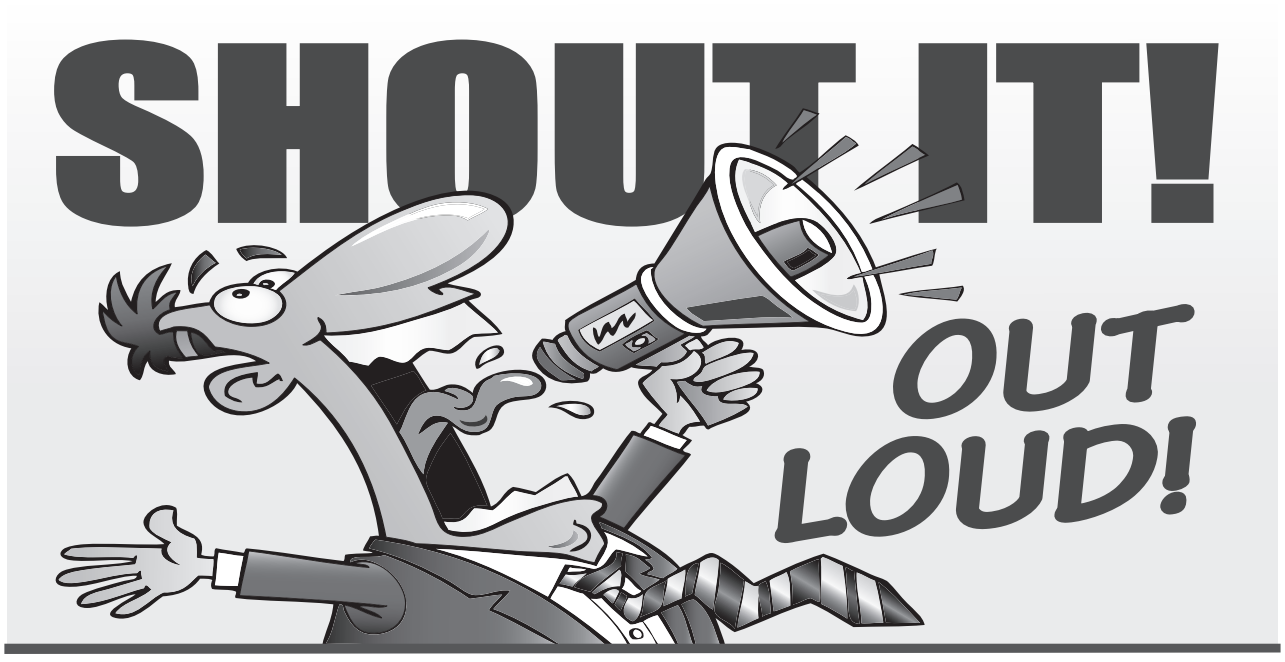
Public Comment for items not on the agenda was held (Comments limited to 5 minutes).

City Manager Kate Hosier gave an update on various topic.

Mayor and Councilpersons shared thoughts and comments

Mayor and Councilpersons shared thoughts and comments.
Meeting adjourned by Mayor Brown at 8:17 p.m.

Megan Kiker,
City Clerk



SOUTH HAVEN COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Ongoing events

Visually impaired and blind persons support group meeting: Every third Wednesday of the month at 1 p.m. at Senior Services of Van Buren County.

Dementia and Alzheimer's caregivers support group meeting: Every third Wednesday of each month at 6 p.m. at Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church library.

Three Blondes Brewing: Trivia night on Thursdays at 7 p.m. and 8 p.m. and Sundays at 1 p.m. and 2 p.m.

Sparkle and Spice Boutique: Mom and Me play date. Fridays from 9-10 a.m.

South Haven Center for the Arts: Center Studio for adults from 6-8 p.m. on the first and third Wednesday of the month. Artists of any level can bring their own projects to work on. Basic art supplies will be available. Attendees must be 18 years old and over. Members are free, non-members cost $5.

South Haven Center for the Arts: Center Studio for ages 9 to 13 from 4-5:30 p.m. every Wednesday. Young artists are invited to create art at their own pace with an instructor to help guide as needed. Free workshop but a $10 donation is suggested to help cover cost of supplies.

Candlelight Yoga: Thursdays at 7:30 p.m. at the Church of Epiphany. Cost is $15.

Food pantry: First Congregational Church open from 10 a.m. to noon on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. It is a drive-up food pantry.

Food pantry: Sacred Heart Catholic Church. For Bangor residents only. Open from 1 to 4 p.m. on Thursdays.

Food, clothing, baby pantry: Lily of the Valley Church in Covert. Open from noon to 2 p.m. on Wednesdays. Must call the central office to register.

Personal care and clothing pantry: First Assembly of God open from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Wednesdays. Must call the central office to register.

Baby pantry: Peace Lutheran Church open from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday. Must call the central office to register.

Baby pantry: Simpson United Methodist Church in Bangor. Open from 10 a.m. to noon on Tuesdays. Must call the central office to register.

South Haven Memorial Library: Story Time on 11 a.m. to noon on Tuesdays through May 26, 2026.

HawksHead: Pasta on the Patio every Wednesday at 5 p.m.

Michigan Maritime Museum: Hands-on the Harbor every Thursday at 10:30 a.m.

Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum: "Over and Under the Snow" by Kate Messner and Christopher Silas Neal StoryWalk available from Jan. 1 to Feb. 28. Call to schedule an appointment.

Lakeside Social Bowling Alley: Glow Bowl every Friday from noon to 9 p.m.

Bridge: Chicago Scoring at 1 p.m. on Tuesdays at the South Haven Memorial Library.

Bridge: Duplicate Scoring at 1 p.m. on Wednesdays at the South Haven Memorial Library.

Michigan Maritime Museum: free admission on the first Sunday of every month from November through April.

First United Methodist Church: Free meals every Tuesday night. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. Meal is served at 6 p.m.

February

10 – Basketball: Girls junior varsity team against Saugatuck High School at 5:30 p.m. at South Haven High School.

10 – Basketball: Girls varsity team against Saugatuck High School at 7 p.m. at South Haven High School.

Photos by Julie Newell / Tribune Editor

From kids to adults, families and local businesses, participants showed off bold designs, team spirit, and plenty of speed on Coastguard Hill for the cardboard sled race.

Artists transform blocks of crystal-clear ice into works of art during the annual Ice Breaker Festival in South Haven.

People of all ages competed in the Frozen Fish Fling to see who could throw a real frozen fish the farthest during South Haven's Ice Breaker Festival.

10 – Rotary Club: Morning meeting – Adam Shinsky to present regarding the National Blueberry Festival.

11 – South Haven Memorial Library: Hooked on Yarn from 1 to 3:30 p.m.

11 – Bowling: Boys and girls varsity team against Quincy High School at 4 p.m. at Lakeside Social.

11 – Basketball: Girls middle school team against Comstock Schools at 4:30 p.m. at Baseline Middle School.

11 – Basketball: Girls middle school team against Fennville High School at 5:30 p.m. at Baseline Middle School.

12 – South Haven Indivisible: Watch the film "God and Country" produced by Rob Reiner. The documentary explores Christian Nationalism's threat to democracy and its distortion of faith for political power. At First congregational Church UCC from 7 to 9 p.m.

12 – Basketball: Boys freshman team against New Buffalo High School at 4 p.m. at South Haven High School.

12 – Basketball: Girls junior varsity team against Bridgman Public School at 5:30 p.m. at South Haven High School.

12 – Swimming: Boys varsity team against Allegan Public School at 6 p.m. at South Haven High School.

12 – Basketball: Girls varsity team against Bridgman Public School at 7 p.m. at South Haven High School.

15 – First Congregational UCC: Winter Concert Series to feature folk duo Payton and Annabelle at 3 p.m. Tickets are $20 at the door.

16 – Basketball: Girls middle school team against Watervliet High School at 4 p.m. at Baseline Middle School.

16 – Basketball: Girls middle school team against Coloma High School at 5 p.m. at Baseline Middle School.

17 – Rotary Club: Evening meeting at 5:30 p.m. at the American Legion – Dan Liehr is the program chair.

17 – Scott Club: A Quilting Journey at 1 p.m. at the First Congregational Church at 651 Phoenix Street.

18 – Basketball: Boys freshman team against Otsego High School at 4 p.m. at South Haven High School.

18 – Basketball: Boys junior varsity team against Otsego High School at 5:30 p.m. at South Haven High School.

18 – Basketball: Boys varsity team against Otsego High School at 7 p.m. at South Haven High School.

20 – South Haven Memorial Library: Messy Play Fridays for preschoolers from 11 a.m. to noon. Wear clothes that can get messy.

20 – Basketball: Girls varsity team against Allegan Public School at 6 p.m. at South Haven High School.

20 – Basketball: Boys varsity team against Allegan Public School at 7:30 p.m. at South Haven High School.

21 – Al-Van Humane Society: Fur Ball 2026: Breakfast at Tiffany's fundraiser event at the Black River Barn.

21 – Basketball: Girls middle school team in the 6th grade Jamboree at 10 a.m. at Baseline Middle School.

24 – Brookside Farms: Meet and greet with Van Buren County District Court Judge candidate Rachel Keeley from 4:30 to 7:30 p.m.

24 – Basketball: Girls freshman team against St. Joseph High School at 4 p.m. at South Haven High School.

24 – Basketball: Girls junior varsity team against Watervliet High School at 5:30 p.m. at South Haven High School.

24 – Basketball: Girls varsity team against Watervliet High School at 7 p.m. at South Haven High School.

24 – Rotary Club: Morning meeting – SHAES Chief Brandon Hinz to present SHAES 2025 review and updates.

25 – South Haven Memorial Library: Hooked on Yarn from 1 to 3:30 p.m.

26 – Basketball: Girls freshman team against Hasting High School at 4 p.m. at South Haven High School.

26 – Basketball: Girls junior varsity team against Berrien Springs High School at 5:30 p.m. at South Haven High School.

26 – Basketball: Girls varsity team against Berrien Springs High School at 7 p.m. at South Haven High School.

27 – Swimming: Boys varsity championship meet.

27 – South Haven Memorial Library: Parent Cafes from 11 a.m. to noon. Snacks and engaging conversation about self-care, support and community resources. Free event. Kids can enjoy Stuffed Animal Story Time with the library staff during the event.

28 – Job Fair: Hosted by the City of South Haven and South Haven Area Emergency Services from noon to 2 p.m. at City Hall.

28 – South Haven Memorial Library: Astronomy Club at 11 a.m.

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SWMI leaders look at collaboration in housing workshop

By LAUREN RICE
Paxton Media Group

BRIDGMAN — Community leaders from around Berrien County recently gathered at Lake Time Brewing & Spirits to participate in a Future of Housing Community Workshop.

The session, hosted by Flywheel Community Development Consultants and Cornerstone Alliance, provided information as well as prompting more specialized discussions about what local governments can do to address the housing shortage.

Around 65 people were there, from several municipalities and other community representatives like Corewell Health and the Michigan Economic Development Corp. Participants were part of large and small group discussions about important statistics and new ideas.

Bridgman City Council Member John Bonkoske said he finds community awareness and a shared understanding of how housing and growth are envisioned is important.

At Your Tables!
Share your Name, Organization, and a 1 minute story of someone you know (could be you) that has experienced a housing challenge.

Don Campbell / PMG

Kelly Ewalt, development director with the city of St. Joseph, and Chris Lannert, with the Lannert Group, center, attend a Housing 101 workshop featuring Ryan Kilpatrick of Flywheel, on Jan. 22 at Lake Time Brewing & Spirits in downtown Bridgman.

"Housing has been discussed a long time," he said. "The longer we talk about it and the more we hone in on it, the closer we are to significant growth that will further not only year-round residents, but enhance the experience for our visitors."

The ideas he highlighted were the use of mixed housing, compact developments and senior living communities. Bonkoske also pointed to the option to revisit some zoning and permitting because proximity to services matters.

"The more we continue to discuss this at the county level with interested parties ... the more successful we will be in obtaining positive traction for long-term prosperity," he said.

Flywheel Founder and CEO Ryan Kilpatrick said he sees Flywheel's role as unpacking the nuance to help participants understand what they have control of at the local level. The design firm does these sessions across the state, already visiting Kalamazoo County, Grand Traverse County and other areas along the Lake Michigan shoreline.

"What typical builders and developers would expect in terms of a return on investment or a return on time invested," he said. "How to partner with nonprofits, if you want to go that route, and what all the tools and resources are that are available. We want people to have a very realistic and grounded perspective of how the housing market works so they can better influence it."

In addition to the need for more than 6,300 new housing units, Kilpatrick highlighted the housing needs specific to Berrien County residents. For example, he said more than 68 precent of households in the county are just one or two adults with no kids at home.

"I think part of what we want to ask our local municipal officials to think about is where and how we are making room for these new household typologies," he said. "What kinds of housing do these folks really want in the community, and how are we enabling that to occur?"

That need might not be limited to single-family homes. There are degrees of housing density, and Kilpatrick pointed out potential benefits of adding some more dense housing like mixed-zoning spaces with apartments, condominiums, row-homes and single-family homes in the same neighborhood.

His example was an 18-acre development: it could be 38 single-family homes with 2.1 homes per acre generating a taxable value of $8 million. Or, it could be 146 mixed-housing types at 8.1 units per acre, generating $23.7 million.

"We didn't say every single neighborhood had to be cookie cutter ... some people want a big lot, some people want a small lot," Kilpatrick said.

St. Joseph Township Trustee Melissa Hahn said she focused on the idea that implementing housing solutions doesn't necessarily mean starting from scratch. It can be adapting strategies that have already been done successfully elsewhere.

She also mentioned "the idea that density helps control cost for both the developer and future renters or homeowners."

Kilpatrick said localities aren't the only part of the solution.

"They're one part of a five-part scenario, but typically everybody else depends on the stage that is set by local government," he said. "Our hope is that they have a real clear understanding of what they have available to them. And then they're able to go back with their respective township boards or city councils and have conversations about prioritization and discussions about what would be a good fit where within the community."

Cornerstone Alliance CEO Marla Schneider said she is interested in bringing Kilpatrick and Flywheel back for another session in the future.

"This is the first session of what we've branded 'Cornerstone Academy,'" she said. "We'll have other academy events where it's a learning session through our staff or we bring in other experts like Ryan. We'll do programming like that throughout the year."

Cornerstone's Community Development Senior Vice President Andrew Haan said those sessions could cover things like incentives, tax increment financing and other tax abatements.

Schneider said this meeting was a precursor to the release of the countywide housing study commissioned by Cornerstone with Bowen National Research. While not scheduled yet, an event to present some of the findings is expected in late February or early March.

Contact: lrice@TheHP.com, 932-0360

Michigan officers cleared in fatal shooting of Grand Blanc church attacker

By KARA BERG
The Detroit News (TNS)

DETROIT — A Michigan Department of National Resources officer and a Grand Blanc police officer will not be charged after they fatally shot a man who drove into a Genesee County church and shot several people, prosecutors said Wednesday.

The officers, whom The Detroit News is not naming because they have not been charged, shot 40-year-old Thomas "Jake" Sanford, of Burton, and ultimately stopped him from killing more people Sept. 28 at the Church of Latter Day Saints in Grand Blanc Township. Sanford shot 10 people, two fatally, and set the building on fire.

John Bond, 77; Thelma Armstrong, 54; Craig Hayden, 72; and William "Pat" Howard, 77, died during the shooting and fire. Two died after being shot and two died in the church fire. Hayden reportedly was killed while trying to help others during the attack. Eight others were wounded.

The victims ranged in age from 6 years old to 78, police said.

The Grand Blanc officer, who was attending service at the church, heard Sanford's pickup crash through the wall, according to the Genesee County Prosecutor's Office, which issued a press release Wednesday detailing its findings in the case.

The officer saw Sanford approaching him carrying an AK-47 rifle as well as a pistol in his belt and shoot at several church members. The officer shot five times at Sanford, but missed and was shot by Sanford three times in the torso.

The DNR officer was on patrol in Grand Blanc Township when he heard radio traffic about the active shooter, according to prosecutors. He saw Sanford enter the church with a gun and a gas can then shouted at him to stop, according to prosecutors. Sanford ignored the officer.

The officer went around to another church entrance and heard gunshots and screaming, but could not see inside the property due to heavy smoke from a fire, according to prosecutors. He heard more shots coming from the opposite side of the building and followed the sound.

He confronted Sanford in the parking lot and fired two shots at him as he hid behind a vehicle, but missed, according to prosecutors. Sanford came out from behind the vehicle with his gun raised above his head and yelled "shoot me," ignoring the officer's commands to stop and put the weapon down, according to prosecutors. The officer ultimately shot and struck Sanford at the same time the Grand Blanc officer did.

A church member pointed his gun at Sanford but did not fire it.

Both officers fired 10 shots at Sanford within 3 minutes and 43 seconds of the Genesee County 911 dispatch getting its first call at 10:25 a.m., Grand Blanc Township Police Chief William Renye said in October.

Sanford's friends told The News he returned from living in the Utah desert for two years a different person, ravaged by crystal meth and an animosity for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

On Oct. 31, the Federal Bureau of Investigation said the probe confirmed its suspicions that Sanford's hatred of the religion drove the assault.

"This is a targeted act of violence believed to be motivated by the assailant's anti-religious beliefs," said Jennifer Runyan, special agent in charge of the FBI office in Detroit.

Runyan didn't say how investigators arrived at the conclusion or give any indication the FBI is still investigating what led to Sanford's rampage.

Burton City Council candidate Kris Johns said when he encountered Sanford at his home a week before the shooting and fire, Sanford steered the conversation toward the Second Amendment and religion, saying at one point: "Mormons are the Antichrist."

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FOCUS

Kenneth K. Lam / Staff

Martha Weiman, 91, who was a little girl in Germany in 1938 when Nazi soldiers stormed her family's home, arrested her father, and took him to the Buchenwald concentration camp. He was later released, and he quickly moved the family to the US and settled in Baltimore. She is pictured with a family photo of her parents with her.

'People are forgetting'

Holocaust survivors recall their stories as antisemitism rises

By JONATHAN M. PITTS
The Baltimore Sun (TNS)

BALTIMORE — Martha Weiman's parents told her and her brothers to stay in an upstairs bedroom the night of November 9, 1939, so they wouldn't see what was about to happen in their beloved hometown of Bocholt, Germany. They peered out anyway.

They saw Nazi soldiers smashing the windows in the synagogue across the street and setting the building on fire. They saw men hauling out prayer books, piling them in the streets and torching them. Then several burst in, arrested their father and took him away to a place called Buchenwald.

The Baltimore Sun interviewed three survivors of the Holocaust, where at least six million Jews perished, and two grown children of survivors, all from Baltimore, in commemoration of Jan. 27, the date long recognized as International Holocaust Remembrance Day. As diverse as their stories are, each agreed with an idea the blunt-talking Weiman shared:

"The Holocaust is ancient history for some people," she said. "But it's not that ancient. I'm still here. People are forgetting. And that's not a good thing."

The Holocaust came to an end 81 years ago, and those who lived through it are a dwindling, elderly few.

Nearly all who are still alive today were children at the time. About 70 percent will be gone within a decade. At a time when antisemitism has once again been rearing its head around the world, survivors like Weiman, now 91 and living in Towson, and their children say they're determined to share what they know as powerfully, as often and for as long as they can.

A last-minute plea

Felicia Graber and Veronica (Vera) Kastenberg, both of Baltimore, are dismayed to see that memories of the genocide are fading – that nearly half of Americans can't name a single Nazi concentration camp, for example, and 40 percent believe no more than 2 million Jews lost their lives – let alone by witnessing the spike in antisemitic acts in the U.S. since the terror attacks of Oct. 7, 2023, that killed more than 1,200 people in Israel.

"I never, ever dreamt that Americans would take to antisemitism," said Graber, 85, of Upper Park Heights, a child survivor and native of Poland who emigrated to the U.S. in 1963. "It's clearly a lack of knowledge and education. It's important that we all spread the word as much as we can."

Graber's stories are a mix of childhood memories and tales her father, Salomon Lederberger, shared with her in a series of interviews.

Not long after she was born in German-occupied Poland in 1940, the Nazis herded the Jews of Graber's hometown, Tarnow, into a ghetto, where they lived for years under constant threat of removal to death camps. The first roundup, on June 10, 1942, targeted the elderly.

One of her three grandparents was shot to death en route to a transport for being too slow. The others were almost certainly killed either at Belzec, an extermination camp where some 450,000 Jews died in gas chambers during the war, or shot along with hundreds of others and buried in a mass grave, she said.

Three months later, the Nazis told parents in the ghetto that their children could be taken to a concentration camp alone or go with them and face the gas chambers together. After Graber's parents chose the latter, they were shipped to a transit point to be picked up and taken by rail to Auschwitz the next morning.

A last-minute plea from a friend somehow convinced a Nazi official that Salomon was indispensable. The three were returned to the ghetto, later escaped with the help of a smuggler, and spent the rest of the war moving from place to place under assumed Catholic names. Graber still remembers her mother drilling into her the Lord's Prayer and how to behave in church.

Graber, who wasn't told she was Jewish until age 7, grew up to marry an American chaplain. They eventually moved to the U.S., where she became a citizen, taught French and German, and published two books – "Amazing Journey: Metamorphosis of a Hidden Child" (2010) and "Our Father's Voice: A Holocaust Memoir" (2012).

Vera Kestenberg's journey has been no less amazing. An 89-year-old Cheswolde resident, she was born into a wealthy Jewish family, the Salazars, in Budapest in 1936, and grew up with a nanny and a family cook. Two years later, her mother, Klara, was alarmed to hear a Hitler speech in which the German leader declared his plan to make neighboring Austria "Judenfrei," or free of Jews.

For about six years, affluent Jews like the Salazars lived relatively normally, even as Nazis and Hungary's allied government imposed restrictions. That changed in 1944, when Hitler invaded Hungary and ordered Adolf Eichmann to deport 550,000 Jews to extermination camps.

The Salazars secured "Aryan IDs" for Vera, then 8, and Klara, who drilled her daughter in her new identity as "a little Catholic girl." Vera remembers the day her mother took her to the entrance of a pedestrian tunnel in the city and told her to walk to the other end, where a family friend would greet and take her to a safer life on a farm in the countryside.

"We had the yellow stars on our coats, but my mother had sewn mine on very lightly," she says. "As she hugged me goodbye, she tore it off and said, 'Now you go.' I think it was more traumatic for her than it was for me.'"

The two would later reconnect and spend months moving from one place to another amid near-constant bombing by Soviet forces. At war's end, they reunited with Vera's father and brother, who had managed a move from a Nazi transit camp to the Glass House, a building a Swiss diplomat, Carl Lutz, used to help thousands of Jews during the Holocaust.

After living under Communist rule for more than a decade, the Salazars moved to South America in 1956, then to Baltimore in 1958, where Kestenberg, as she became known after marrying for a second time, turned a biochemistry degree she had earned in Budapest into a long career at Johns Hopkins University researching the effects of lead paint on children.

Living in the woods

As their numbers are now in steady decline, Holocaust survivors are leaning more than ever on "second-generation survivors" to pass their stories along. For some, like Anne Pfeffer and Richard Grilli of Baltimore County, their parents' histories are part of their own.

Pfeffer was born in 1947, two years after the end of World War II, in Bergen-Belsen, a displaced-persons camp that had served as a concentration camp during the war. About 52,000 prisoners had died there, mostly of disease and starvation.

When he was in the mood, her father told her of his exploits during the war. What she heard was a tale of courage and miraculous escapes. "Indiana Jones had nothing on my father," she said.

Joseph Kalichman grew up in Josefov, a town in southeastern Poland. After Hitler invaded the country in 1939, the Nazis implemented laws designed to degrade and isolate Jews, and Joseph and his father, Moishe, lived much of the time with resistance guerrillas outside town.

One day in 1942, with the men in the woods, Nazi officers rounded up some 2,000 of the city's Jewish women and children, Joseph's mother and sister among them, and marched them into a forest. They were shot and buried in a mass grave.

The following February, Joseph himself was one of about 5,000 men and boys who were rounded up and packed on trains bound for the Majdanek extermination camp. The Germans sent 4,000 to the gas chambers on the first day. Joseph was one of the 1,000 set to die the next morning.

That afternoon, though, he noticed a door in the prison wall that the Germans used to deliver supplies. He slipped through the opening that night, and by the time armed and mounted guards learned of the escape, he was making his way through the Polish woodlands.

Joseph's next few months were the stuff of movies – dodging pursuers' bullets, finding refuge in a farmhouse, believing at one point he'd been shot to death, and traveling among partisan camps in the woods until he'd completed the 109-mile return to Josefov.

After rejoining the guerrillas, he found his father's remains in a forest outside town. He identified Moishe by the tefillin – leather boxes containing Torah scrolls for daily prayer – beside him.

Pfeffer describes those adventures – and Joseph's later life as a prosperous builder in Upstate New York – in It's Not My Story, a book she wrote and published in 2014. "He says it was all luck, but I think he's the bravest person I've ever met," she says.

Richard Grilli, meanwhile, has gone to great lengths to preserve the memory of his mother, Olga Bergmann Grilli, who survived the Holocaust thanks to a painful sacrifice by her mother and the efforts of a celebrated humanitarian.

She was 10 when Hitler completed the occupation of Czechoslovakia in March 1939. As restrictions on Jews tightened, her mother, Marie Bergmann, considered drastic measures, acting on rumors of a British man organizing rescue trains. That July, she took Olga to Prague and put her on Nicholas Winton's Kindertransport – the last train allowed to leave.

Three years later, the Germans arrested Marie and her two sisters and sent them to a transit camp, then on to Auschwitz, where they died in the gas chambers in 1943. All but 150 of the 15,000 Jewish-Czech children who lived in the region were executed as part of a purge that killed half a million Czech Jews.

An elderly British family took Olga in as part of Winton's program. She emigrated to the U.S. in 1946 to live with an aunt, but she never got over the choice her mother had to make.

A terrible tale

In 1939, Weiman and her family experienced Kristallnacht, a pogrom by the Nazis against Jewish people throughout Germany, Austria, and part of Czechoslovakia. Civilians joined paramilitary forces to destroy some 1,400 synagogues and prayer rooms, wreck 7,000 Jewish businesses, arrest 30,000 Jewish men and kill nearly 100 people that night.

Weiman's father, who had been arrested and taken away on Kristallnacht, had some luck on his side. The Nazis hadn't turned Buchenwald into the full-fledged death camp it would become quite yet, and Weiman's mother got the documentation needed to get him released. He'd been beaten so badly the lenses in both eyes were dislocated. He wore thick glasses the rest of his life.

The family soon caught a freighter to London, then emigrated to America, the land of opportunity. Now Weiman wonders what might happen even here.

"If you were a kid, and someone told you about the Holocaust, would you believe it?" she said. "It sounds like a terrible fairy tale."

FOCUS

Burning trees to help the planet?

South Florida tries new climate tech solution

By ASHLEY MIZNAZI and MICHELLE MARCHANTE
Miami Herald (TNS)

Matias J. Ocner / Miami Herald / TNS

Mike Schmitt, director of sales and marketing with Air Burners, is photographed next to a BioCharger unit on Thursday in Palm City, Florida. Air Burners is a manufacturer of air curtain burner systems, which provide a controlled way to dispose of wood and other vegetative waste.

MIAMI — In lush South Florida, trees and bushes grow all year round. And that means yard waste and dead trees never stop piling up. But leaving them in a landfill is a climate-warming issue.

Two South Florida governments think they have a new solution – light it on fire, but in a planet-friendly way.

Miami-Dade County and Coral Gables, one of the richest cities in the region, are both turning to new technology that leans on ancient farming practices to transform wood waste into a charcoal-like material called biochar.

The material known as "black carbon" has the potential to clean dirty water, nourish soil and even be used in roads.

Plus, it has lower emissions than a simple bonfire, leading to cleaner, healthier air that contributes less to climate change.

"We need to evolve. We need to find solutions that are outside your standard box," said Coral Gables Mayor Vince Lago, who began looking for green waste alternatives years ago. "The way that we have been disposing of waste and garbage over the last 25 years is outdated, and it's not environmentally friendly."

Gables leaders are getting ready to drop millions to create a facility that will use large, futuristic ovens to bake fallen trees and other vegetative waste into biochar, which could be used as fertilizer in golf courses and parks and mixed into concrete and asphalt for sidewalks and parking lots. Lago also believes the machines will help the city combat "illegal dumping" of trees and other green matter waste by landscapers who work all over the county and then use the city as their own personal dumping ground.

Manufacturers say the machines use powerful streams of air to limit the release of smoke, significantly reducing the presence of cancer-causing pollutants. It also produces energy that powers the facility and still gives the Gables some extra charge for its large fleet of electric vehicles, including an electric garbage truck that is currently being tested on the streets.

"We want to look at how we can be better stewards of the environment," said Coral Gables City Manager Peter Iglesias.

It's not a cheap project. The city would need to drop about $3.47 million for two biochar-making machines, with a total expected price tag for the project a hefty $7.5 million. The total cost includes an expansion project on the property that would involve cleaning up a nearby contaminated piece of land and the opening of an unrelated training facility for city firefighters.

The City Beautiful, known for its lush tree canopy, expects its waste-to-energy and biochar initiative to save it $1 million annually, and also bring in revenue. Iglesias said the city plans to offer its biochar-making services to other cities, as well as commercial landscapers, with hopes to possibly sell and ship biochar all over the country.

Gables residents won't necessarily see a decrease in their current garbage fees. Both Lago and Iglesias describe the move as taking control of the city's future, protecting residents from the possibility of rising garbage and disposal fees as the county's waste crisis worsens.

After the city's main waste solution, a trash incinerator, burned down in 2023, Miami-Dade has so much trash that it ships about half by train to out-of-county facilities, increasing both environmental and financial costs, both to the county and the cities that depend on Miami-Dade to dispose of their garbage.

It's a "Win, Win, Win Win, Win," Iglesias said, noting that the city is "managing an urban forest" that is home to over 42,000 trees, making it a prime breeding ground for biochar.

Iglesias is hoping to get the Gables biochar facility operating within two years. The county expects to start baking biochar as early as the end of January at the South Dade landfill.

One problem? Both governments are eyeing the same piece of land for trash-related purposes.

A trashy spot

The spot the Gables wants to install the multi-million dollar biochar facility is currently being leased to the county as a waste-transfer site, a holding ground for trash the county collects from all over Miami-Dade before taking it to the landfill.

Miami-Dade County has paid the Gables for the past 30 years to use the property, which is part of the city's public works facility on Southwest 72nd Avenue. In 2025, the county paid a total of about $520,000 in rent.

But for the Gables, the projected cost-savings of operating its own biochar facility are worth losing the county as a tenant, according to Iglesias.

The city pays the county nearly $1.3 million annually for waste disposal, much of which is trees and other vegetative waste. It projects that operating its own biochar facility will cut the cost by 80 percent.

Miami-Dade's lease ends in March, though the Gables is currently in talks with the county to extend the lease – potentially for a higher rental fee – for an additional one to two years to give time for the county to clean up and restore the site, and find an alternate waste transfer location.

"The transfer site is not something you can just uproot and plant somewhere else the next day. There's a lot of logistics and a lot of equipment associated with that operation," said Aneisha Daniel, the Director of Miami-Dade's Solid Waste Management.

Two companies, same goal

While both Miami-Dade and Coral Gables are pursuing biochar facilities and say they're open to working together, they're using two different companies that will deliver two slightly different end products.

The Gables turned to Palm City-based Air Burners, a company whose machines have been used across the world for over 30 years.

Iglesias said the city is still deciding between the many machines Air Burners offers. One possible contender: the "Biocharger," a machine that prioritizes making energy and quickly disposing of tons of wood waste, according to scientists.

Mike Schmitt, an Air Burners representative, claims that the "Biocharger" burns wood waste 40 times faster than a campfire-style burn and creates three tons of biochar for every 100 tons of wood waste.

It works by a crane dropping wood into the machine's "fire box". A generator forces air across the top of the box, making an "air curtain" that blocks oxygen and reduces smoke. There's a counterclockwise circulation of air inside that box, which forces everything to get re-burned several times. Air Burners claims the process reduces harmful particulates in the air by 90 percent.

"There's hardly any emissions that come out of the air curtain burners," said Deborah Dumroese, a Research Soil Scientist for the USDA, who has worked with biochar for more than 17 years.

The county is going with a startup, Clean Earth Innovations, a Fort Lauderdale biochar startup company, which was awarded $100,000 by the Miami-Dade Innovation Authority to operate a biochar machine at the South Dade landfill. It is already on site, undergoing "fine-tuning." Once it opens at the end of the month, it will run seven days a week, Daniel said.

Pilot projects with the county can last no longer than one year, and the county hasn't made any commitments beyond that with Clean Earth Innovations.

Both machines help curb two of the most widespread, deadly air pollutants – fine particulate matter and ozone. Heating everything also kills off PFAS – or "forever chemicals."

But there are some differences.

For starters, Miami-Dade's pilot project is a much smaller operation. The machine will only process 4,000 tons, or less than 1 percent, of the county's approximate 500,000 tons of green waste. The county hopes to grow the operation if the tests go well.

"We're trying to determine if it's scalable for widespread waste reduction," said Nick Ciancio, the Resilience Division Director for the Miami-Dade Department of Solid Waste Management. "Every little bit of cutting emissions is good, but I didn't want to make the impression that this pilot project alone would be a monumental emissions reduction."

Miami-Dade's machine doesn't produce energy like the Biocharger the Gables is eyeing, but it makes more biochar per load. Air Burners said biochar in the Biocharger makes up 3-5 percent of the end product, while Miami-Dade's makes around 20 percent. The type of trees, plants and technology used in the process affects how much carbon the biochar stores.

For the biochar to be created, it needs to be in a low-oxygen environment and cooled with water while it's in an in-between state of wood and ash. Miami-Dade's machine has a closed lid and a built-in mister that brings the biochar through a conveyor belt and drops it into a bag.

"It's more efficient, it's better for production, and it's even cleaner … that's what we're focused on, doing things that are environmentally pristine," said Clean Earth Innovations CEO Harold Gubnitsky.

Air Burners' "Biocharger," on the other hand, has to be raked out the next morning and dunked in water. By then, the charcoal will be mostly turned into ash, according to Dumroese, a soil scientist for the USDA.

"Ash is full of nutrients, and so you could use it as a fertilizer, but it's not porous like the charcoal is, and so the soil benefits aren't as great, and they're not as long-lasting," Dumroese said.

Water purifier? Fertilizer? Animal food?

Xianming Shi, a University of Miami professor of civil and architectural engineering, has been in early conversations with Miami-Dade County and the City of Coral Gables about collaborating on ways to use biochar – either in road construction or to help remove pollutants from local waterways.

Storm runoff carries a lot of nitrogen, phosphate and heavy metals. According to Shi, biochar can trap those contaminants and purify the water. Then, there is a possibility to reuse the biochar as fertilizer.

"It's like a sponge capturing both the water-borne pollutants and the airborne," Shi said.

Biochar's benefits were first discovered more than 2,000 years ago, but research into its modern uses has accelerated over the last decade. There are even small studies looking at adding it to cow feed to see whether it can reduce methane emissions.

"The potential is there right now. What's limiting the development is really that this is so new that the equipment, the market, takes time," Shi said.

While its effectiveness as a soil amendment and water purifier is well established, its use in concrete is still relatively new. Shi said he found a way to replace 30 percent of a cement mix with biochar and up to 20 percent in asphalt pavement.

"Right after you're paving, you can still smell the toxic emissions. Residents get exposed to the toxic fume, even if you don't see it. But with biochar, it grabs all the volatile stuff. This is a community benefit," Shi said.

How biochar changes Gables' hurricane clean-up

Although the Gables says one machine is all it would require to meet the city's green waste needs, it wants to buy two Air Burner machines, both to help with extra debris after hurricanes and as a potential side business handling green waste from other cities.

It expects to recoup the $7.5 million remediation and setup costs in three to five years. It plans to seek partnerships with FPL and other entities, as well as apply for federal and state grants, to help offset the project's costs.

The Gables has already begun discussions with neighboring cities, including the City of Miami, South Miami and Pinecrest about turning their own green waste into biochar.

"We're a leafy city" and are "looking at every possible way to minimize our footprint on what actually gets put in a landfill," said South Miami Mayor Javier Fernandez. The mayor said he's concerned about the future increases in trash fees and looking for possible sustainable solutions. He said the city wants to work with Miami-Dade and is trying to negotiate a better interlocal agreement with the county that makes financial sense for the city.

Iglesias also sees a biochar set up as a faster, more efficient solution for a big problem for the Gables – clearing up downed trees after a hurricane.

When Hurricane Irma struck, for example, the city collected 360,000 cubic yards, or about 62,000 tons of yard waste following the storm. That's how much debris the Gables usually collects in 2.4 years

"We don't want a science project. We want a facility and this product, these folks have been around for 30 years," said Iglesias.

"Not a magic bullet"

Because the Gables is eyeing placing their machines on a piece of land near a neighborhood, it matters how much smoke this process creates. By all accounts, the answer is not much.

During a recent tour of Air Burner's warehouse, the Herald was taken to a nearby landscaping company that uses one of the biochar-making machines. However, no workers were present and the machines were not operating. There was a Firebox with visible smoke coming out the top – the nearby area smelled like a campfire.

Dumroese, the USDA soil researcher, said there will be some smoke at the beginning and towards the end of the day when the system is trying to get everything cooled down.

"The idea is to make sure everything that's burned before it's shut down for the day … But, you know, sometimes you don't plan quite right, and it will continue to smolder in the burn box. And, yeah, you get some emissions from that," Dumroese said.

The machines aren't perfect, said John Webster of the US Biochar Initiative, a nonprofit group that promotes biochar. Once, a barbed wire got into their machine, and they had to burn it and then reach in with a hook to fish it out. The county, too, is already grappling with how to ensure the loads are clean of contaminants like paint and plastic.

"They're not a magic bullet, but they are highly effective tools for good," Webster said.

Ashley Miznazi is a climate change reporter for the Miami Herald funded by the Lynn and Louis Wolfson II Family Foundation and MSC Cruises in partnership with Journalism Funding Partners.

FOCUS

Groundhogs are lousy forecasters but valuable animal engineers – and an important food source

By STEVEN SULLIVAN
Director of the Hefner Museum of Natural History, Miami University (The Conversation)

Whether you call him groundhog, woodchuck, whistle-pig or use the full genus and species name, Marmota monax, the nation's premiere animal weather forecaster has been making headlines as Punxsutawney Phil for decades.

The largest ground squirrel in its range, groundhogs like Phil are found throughout the midwestern United States, most of Canada and into southern Alaska. M. monax is the most widespread marmot, while the Vancouver Island marmot (M. vancouverensis) is found only on one island in British Columbia.

In total, there are 15 species in the genus Marmota, found around the world from as far south as the Jemez Mountains of New Mexico and the Pyrenees Mountains of Spain, north to regions of Siberia and Alaska so dark and cold that the marmots must hibernate for up to nine months of the year.

Hibernating to escape tough times

Marmots, including all the actors who have played Phil over the years, are the largest "true" hibernators: animals that enter a torpor that reduces their biological functions to a level closer to dead than alive.

Because this phenomenon is so interesting, scientists pay attention to all aspects of marmot anatomy and physiology. Basic observational science like this is important to advance our understanding of the world, and it sometimes leads to discoveries that improve human lives. Marmot studies are the foundation for experiments to address obesity, cardiovascular disease, mpox, stress, hepatitis and liver cancer, and they may inform work on osteoporosis and organ transplantation.

Aging seems to nearly stop during hibernation, as the marmot heart rate drops from nearly 200 beats per minute when active to about nine during hibernation. Similarly, their active body temperature can be 104 degrees Fahrenheit (40 degrees Celsius) – about the same as a dog or cat – but plummet to 41 F (5 C) when hibernating. Humans, in comparison, become hypothermic at a core temperature of 95 F (35 C).

Fueling feast and famine

Marmots' only source of energy during the hibernation period is stored fat, which they may metabolize as slowly as 1 gram per day. But even that is a large amount when it must suffice for more than half a year.

So, marmots need to double their weight during the summer, even in places where the season is only a few months long. To do so, they double the size of their hibernation-state gastrointestinal tract and liver, and then carefully select the most nutritious plants, including legumes, flowers, grains and grasses. Despite their corpulence, they can also climb trees to eat buds and fruit.

Gardener, architect and menu item

The digging and seed dispersal that accompany foraging create flower-filled meadows. Some marmots, like Mongolia's Tarbagan marmot (M. siberica), are keystone species whose presence is associated with increased diversity of plants and predators.

Marmot burrows are a key architectural component of many other animals' habitats. Abandoned marmot excavations can provide temperature- and humidity-controlled housing for dozens of species, from frogs to foxes and snakes to owls.

The same activities can make groundhogs a pest to people. In most of the Midwest, groundhog predators were largely eliminated at the same time that agricultural fields became vast marmot buffets. Today, many groundhog populations are tightly controlled by invasive coyotes, as well as recovering populations of bobcats.

Because they are such a high-quality meal, marmots are an important conduit of energy from plants to carnivores. Everything from hawks to eagles, weasels to wolves may eat them. And, like most native birds and mammals, marmots are on the menu of house cats, too. Humans also have long exploited marmots for meat and fur. As a result, once-common marmot species are rare in many places.

But marmots breed like the proverbial bunnies and so have the potential to come back quickly from population declines. They can be reintroduced to former haunts, benefiting the ecosystem.

Hibernation must end at the right time

Shortly after waking from hibernation, marmots mate, giving birth about 4½ weeks later to half a dozen or more offspring. Ideally, pups are born just as the first plants peak through the snowmelt – maximizing the time available to pack on fat for the coming hibernation season.

Given the food needs of these big ground squirrels, and the fact they may be seen poking their heads above the snow before any food is available, it seems reasonable to assume that they have some power of weather prediction. Indeed, people celebrate scores of individual groundhogs across the U.S. and Canada for their ability to anticipate weather six weeks hence.

This American groundhog tradition apparently started with German immigrants recalling the spring emergence of badgers and hedgehogs in the old country. Brown bears have a similar spring schedule and are still celebrated in Romaniaand Serbia.

People ascribe weather-predicting abilities to other species, too, including woolly bear caterpillars, sheep, cats and dormice.

One tradition holds that tree squirrel nests, called dreys, can predict the severity of the coming winter. Leafy dreys are well ventilated and private – good choices if you need less protection during a warm winter. More insulated hollow trees are cozy in the cold but communal, and so come with the risk of sharing parasites. As a squirrel researcher, I've noted the location, number and size of nests for years but seen no discernible patterns related to weather.

THE CONVERSATION

Weather responders, not weather predictors

Despite traditional claims, you've probably already guessed that Phil and his friends are about as good at predicting the coming weather as that kid who answers "C" for every multiple choice question. A 2021 study on the subject reported that groundhogs' "predictions of spring onset (are) no better than chance." That's right, groundhogs are correct 50 percent of the time.

One big problem with relying on any species on a specific calendar day is that seasons follow latitude and altitude. Anyone who has hiked the Appalachian Trail can tell you that trekking from south to north maximizes your time in cool spring weather. Similarly, if you venture to the peaks of the Rockies in August, you'll find spring wildflowers.

For this reason, groundhogs in Alabama emerge from their dens much earlier than those in Wisconsin. As one Canadian newspaper put it in 1939, "Here in Manitoba, no woodchuck in his senses would voluntarily emerge into the cold on February 2."

Animals' senses are tools for survival

Modern technology can accurately predict the average weather – that is, climate – far into the future, and the precise weather five days in advance. But the accuracy of a forecast at a given point on Earth 10 days in the future is only about 50 percent – as good as a groundhog.

However, many animals are sensitive to phenomena that humans need tools to even notice.

Flocks of warblers, sparrows and other birds sometimes seem to appear out of nowhere before a storm. These species often migrate at night, navigating across land and sea by the stars and Earth's magnetic fields. To avoid getting lost in fog or blown off course, they'll "fall out" of the sky at good resting spots when bad weather is building. At such times, take the warbler's advice and don't venture out on the water.

Frogs chirping in spring indicate that water temperatures are warm enough for eggs, while air temperatures influence caterpillar hatching and activity. Farmers over the centuries have recorded the blooming dates of flowers over the years as a way to predict when to plant and harvest.

Noticing and tracking timing of annual events

Phenology is the study of these natural phenomena and their annual cycles, from the first springtime peek of a groundhog to the last autumn honk of a goose. When does the first flower bloom in your neighborhood, the first thunder clap rumble, or the last cricket chirp?

No individual observation, even Phil's, has the power to predict the weather. But in aggregate, these observations can tell us a lot about what the world is doing and predict how it will change. You can be like Phil and look for your shadow, or a nice legume to eat, and then contribute to science by adding your observations to the National Phenology Network.

Traditions don't need to be factually true to be useful. Groundhog shadows bring people together at a cold time of year to look at the clouds, notice buds on the trees and track down the earliest green sprouts, such as skunk cabbage, which warms the snow around it. This Groundhog Day, get out there and enjoy nature as you celebrate the lengthening days and increased activities of the organisms we share this planet with.

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Ornelas / Getty Images

FOCUS

How is Metro Surge impacting pets?

Here's what rescues tell us

By MOLLY GUTHREY
Pioneer Press (TNS)

John Autey

Cassie Eiynck, a pet groomer at Pet Evolution St. Paul, holds the leash of Lafond, a rescue dog, as Sarah Watson, a volunteer with Pooches United with People (PUP), tells Lafond sheâ€™ll back after the dog's haircut and bath in St. Paul, Minnesota, on Thursday, Jan. 15, 2026. (John Autey/Pioneer Press/TNS)

MINNEAPOLIS – A North Minneapolis woman taking in a sudden influx of stray animals in crisis needed help, especially after a rescued dog in her care unexpectedly gave birth to a litter of puppies.

A small rescue already at capacity referred the case to Jeanne Weigum of Pooches United with People (PUP), who called the woman to get more information.

"The first words out of her mouth were, 'I'm Hispanic,'" said Weigum of the St. Paul-based nonprofit. "She basically indicated that she had taken in all these dogs and cats of people who were being 'disappeared' from the ICE activity. She said people are going away and they're just putting their dogs and cats outdoors, hoping somebody will take care of them. She said she was working with a young man who was helping catch these dogs and cats and bringing them to her. She told me she'd already rehomed seven dogs."

Even though Weigum was aware of the heavy presence of Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers in the Twin Cities for Operation Metro Surge, it was still startling to hear about these particular ripple effects.

"Even though I work with dogs, this was brand new to me and I'm embarrassed to say I had never even thought of it," Weigum said.

This crisis is different from past pet crises, Weigum says.

"Because of Katrina, when there was such a catastrophe with animals, the whole animal rescue community figured out how to deal with these big crises," said Weigum of the 2005 hurricane. "So if it's a hurricane or if there's something like that, like floods, the big rescue organizations are set up now to deal with those issues, but this is a rolling crisis. It's clearly a rolling crisis in our community."

For pets and their people, it's also a quieter kind of crisis, one that some organizations and rescuers are still realizing.

"The fact that nobody had talked to me about it, that I hadn't thought about it, suggests to me that this is a crisis that we haven't even defined yet as a crisis," Weigum said recently. "Once you define something as a crisis, you start figuring out what to do about it. I'm not sure anybody's even doing that yet."

A dog in a car

In an interview with Michael Barbaro of " The Daily," a New York Times podcast, Minneapolis Police Chief Brian O'Hara was asked about how ICE operations were impacting policing in the city.

That impact included the story of a dog in a car.

"So we've just gotten a pretty dramatic increase in 911 calls from people in the community related to a lot of the street enforcement that's happening," O'Hara said in the interview that aired on Jan. 12. "And it's things like: People are being arrested, and their cars are left – sometimes left in the roadway, sometimes blocking the street, and in one case left when it wasn't even placed in park and was rolling down the road. We had another time where there was a dog in the car, and they left the dog in the car."

But, in terms of the numbers of dogs and cats in the animal control system, it doesn't appear to be a significant issue yet.

"MACC (Minneapolis Animal Care & Control) hasn't seen a real uptick," said a spokesperson for the city of Minneapolis. "Just a few animals."

It's the same in St. Paul.

"We have the same year-to-date number of impounded animals as we did this time last year," said a spokesperson with the city of St. Paul.

The Animal Humane Society, the largest animal welfare organization in the Upper Midwest, concurs.

"We have had less than a handful of calls that we know of over the last couple of weeks related to ICE," said a spokesperson last week. "We take about 1,000-plus calls a month, so three calls in two weeks isn't huge. These folks were surrendering because they were either leaving the country or state, or in one instance the owner was deported and a co-worker had their dog and was surrendering to us."

But if this situation is impacting pets, some local rescue groups say, in addition to potential language barriers, people might not feel comfortable saying why they are surrendering their animals – and, anecdotally, they are turning for help within their own circle, if they have time to turn to anyone at all.

(At press time, the Pioneer Press was waiting to hear back from U.S. Department of Homeland Security representatives on how they handle pets if detaining people locally.)

But, across all rescues interviewed, it's clear that pet owners currently in fear of being detained or deported are needing places or people to take their pets in an emergency and they need help now getting supplies like pet food and cat litter while they hunker down at home during this surge.

Feline Rescue

Across St. Paul at Feline Rescue, the kennels are full and the inquiries are incoming.

"We have seen an uptick of cats left at our door," said Traia Thiel, cat support services manager of the St. Paul-based nonprofit. "I can't say it's ICE-related, but it feels correlated. They are usually in carriers. I commend them for leaving them in a place that all but guarantees cats end up safe, but it's cold."

Sometimes, the rescue does know more about the pets' stories due to the inquiries they receive.

"One type is folks who are reaching out on behalf of their neighbors who have had to go into hiding, and so they've left their cats with their neighbors who are then trying to rehome the cats for them," Thiel said.

Another recent call came in for help from people also in hiding while dealing with a deported family member's two litters of kittens.

"They're suddenly trying to feed all these kittens and they haven't been able to leave the house to get food and supplies," Thiel said.

Feline Rescue is doing what it can to help, despite a full house from taking in cats from an unrelated hoarding situation as well as the current atmosphere of fear and uncertainty.

"Our adoption rates have dropped over the last two weeks," Thiel said. "It's cold, people are scared to come in and maybe it feels like not a good time to make a permanent decision for your family … but we are trying to reserve intake slots for anyone directly affected by Immigration and Customs Enforcement."

The nonprofit also partners with Keystone Community Services, bringing pet supplies to Keystone for its food programs, which include a mobile food shelf service.

For more info or to donate to Feline Rescue's Community Outreach & Services, visit felinerescue.org/community-outreach-and-services/. The rescue is also in need of foster homes for senior cats and behavioral/under-socialized cats, apply at felinerescue.volunteerportal.org/?nd=opportunities.

Pet Haven

The staff at Pet Haven – a foster-based animal rescue with a facility on Minnehaha Avenue in St. Paul – are also seeing people and pets in crisis right now.

"We've taken in about 18 animals that have been directly affected by ICE operations," said Kerry D'Amato, executive director. "I cry more often these days than I ever have. Our facility is in the heart of one of Minnesota's oldest historical immigrant neighborhoods, Frogtown. We are under attack. Our neighbors are scared. Fosters afraid to leave their house to come get supplies. We are all suffering."

In some cases, it's not clear why the pets were separated from their owner – like Otto. The dog was found in an abandoned vehicle that was towed to an impound lot. It took a long time, possibly a month, before anyone discovered the dog and brought him to Pet Haven.

"We have him," D'Amato said. "He somehow survived."

There are other cases where the pets' stories are definitely related to Operation Metro Surge.

"On Friday, we took in six dogs from three different families, all affected by ICE," D'Amato said. "The immigrant community is very tight and they support each other. There is a community member, in the Latin community, this person became the drop-off point for people who were taken or fearing being taken or leaving, so this person took all these animals and contacted someone who knew us.

"Three days before, we also took in two cats from a mobile home park that belonged to a husband and wife taken by ICE," she said.

People are coming to Pet Haven, D'Amato says, because they know it really is a haven.

"We have whistles at our front door, we have a sign that says ICE is not welcome; people know it's a safe space," she said.

That said, the costs are significant: In Otto's case, for example, he is currently in foster care and his dental work alone could cost $3,000 or more.

The public can drop off pet food and supplies at Pet Haven, 505 W. Minnehaha Ave., from 11 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. on Wednesdays and Fridays, 3 to 7 p.m. on Thursdays and 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Saturdays. More info/donate at pethavenmn.org.

The Bond Between

The ordinary tasks of going to the store to purchase food for your pet or taking them on a walk are not something everyone feels comfortable doing right now in the Twin Cities.

This is something that Rachel Mairose, executive director of the Bond Between, is learning.

"Somebody that I ran into yesterday was crying because she hadn't walked her dog in a month because she was too scared to go outside," Mairose said. "She said, 'What kind of world is this where I can't even walk my dog?' That's just heartbreaking to hear."

The Bond Between wants to help.

"We're hoping to be a resource for people who are potentially going to be displaced," Mairose said.

The nonprofit encourages pet owners to have a plan in place for their pets as Operation Metro Surge continues.

"Everybody's talking about the human side of it, but pets are also impacted by all of this," Mairose said.

The nonprofit, which has locations in Minneapolis and Minnetonka, is letting the community know they are open to both surrenders and respite care for pets in this crisis. The organization also has a food shelf.

The help is needed.

"Right now, it's friends or family members of people who have been detained or are deported and they have custody of the animal, so they're the ones reaching out to us," Mairose said.

This is how the organization came to know a Mastiff-Cane Corso mix named Chapo who is in need of a foster home.

"His dad was taken," Mairose said. "A friend is taking care of him, but can't long term, and this is not something he expected to happen – that's his family member and it's horrible to feel helpless after you have been detained."

It's not the organization's only pet in crisis.

"We have another family where the father is getting deported to Venezuela and his wife and daughter are going to follow him because they want to stay together, but they have a little dog they can't take," she said. "These are the situations that are heartbreaking right now – the animal is confused and it's just another layer of stress for that family that is already going through a hard time. And so, we're just doing what we can to get resources to families."

To learn about those resources as well as fostering/donating, go to thebondbetween.org.

Good Samaritans

The Minneapolis woman who is taking in displaced animals spoke to the Pioneer Press recently about the situation from her home in Minneapolis, on the phone and with a rescued cat sitting on her chest while she talked.

The Pioneer Press is not naming the woman at her request; she has security concerns.

While she lives in Minneapolis now, the displaced animals in her care come from a suburban mobile home community where she says she used to live; she still is in contact with some neighbors, including a young good Samaritan rescuing animals there as people scramble in the face of ICE's presence.

"He was asking me to take this animal or that animal, and I asked, 'What is going on?'" she said. "That's when he said that people are just opening doors and letting pets out."

While she says she has not witnessed the situation herself, the young man paints a picture of a tense neighborhood: "He told me about one guy coming back from getting groceries on his bike and they arrested him," she said.

Helping the pets of her former neighborhood feels natural; some of her first memories in Mexico involve trying to save chickens, she says.

"I was born that way," she said. "I have been protecting animals all my life."

That includes a young dog named Lafond and her six puppies.

Lafond's spa day

As some dogs around her got a bit feisty for their time in "The Groom Room" on Jan. 15, Lafond quietly enjoyed her comped grooming session at Pet Evolution St. Paul at 1074 Grand Ave.

"The whole spa day, she got it," said Angie Reeves, owner of the St. Paul location.

The former stray, possibly a Shih Tzu mix, definitely needed tidying up after running loose and giving birth: She had some matted hair and other hygiene issues, but one thing was clear to groomer Cassie Eiynck: This dog was socialized, this dog was loved. A lap dog, probably. And now, after apparently losing her home for unknown reasons and in unknown circumstances, a dog with a fresh start.

"You did such a good job," said PUP volunteer Sarah Watson when the grooming session was finished and dog treats were in hand.

"I loved helping her out," Eiynck said.

The pet store does what it can, with the owner covering the cost of grooming and tip for Lafond's session but also regularly hosting adoption events for PUP.

"We're not taking political stances or anything," Reeves said. "We're just really wanting to support folks being impacted."

After Lafond's puppies are weaned, they will be available for adoption before their mom, who will be available later, after she is out of the postpartum period and has been spayed. Check/donate at pupmn.org.

Advice for pet owners

The Minneapolis woman with the dog and puppies had initially reached out to a different animal rescue organization in the metro. This small but established rescue asked PUP to help because they already had their hands full. They still do.

When contacted by the Pioneer Press earlier this month, the rescue had just taken in several dogs from someone who told them they had ICE knocking on their door. After initially giving an interview to the Pioneer Press, the organization's president later asked not to be named as they are busy with current requests for help from the community, including helping those with cats in need.

She did share some advice for all of us, though, citizens as well as people without legal status.

"The biggest thing is to let people know: Don't take animals in your car if you are going for an errand," she said. "Because you don't know if ICE is going to stop you, detain you and leave the animal in a running car. Only take the pets out if you are bringing them to a vet appointment."

Also, she said, if you believe you are at risk of detainment, leave a piece of paper somewhere prominently in your home with emergency contacts for people or organizations who can help your pets.

"Because, like this mom with puppies," she said, "it's typically your neighbors watching out for you."

Saying goodbye to Master Shifu

The young woman arrived at Feline Rescue with red eyes, her cat in a carrier.

It was time to say goodbye to Master Shifu.

"I'm originally from Canada and I have the privilege of being white in this country right now, but I just feel sick that my tax dollars are going toward what they are right now … it's just so scary," said the woman, a dual citizen who asked not to be identified out of security concerns. "And so me and my family talked about it and we were like, 'We have to go back.'"

Master Shifu, however, is staying here.

"My partner's in Canada and they're very allergic to cats," she said.

Because no one she knew here could take in her cat, she was surrendering Master Shifu to Feline Rescue, who will find a new home for the young tuxedo.

"I looked into this rescue and I'm very hopeful because it seems like there are a lot of great people who work here," she said.

Thiel is one of those people. On Friday, she walked the woman through the paperwork, handed her a box of tissues and gave her time to privately say goodbye to Master Shifu as he settled into the kennel where he would be temporarily housed.

"I'm sorry," the woman said to her cat. "I love you."

Master Shifu is now available for adoption. View his profile at felinerescue.org.

HEALTH

Aging-related weight gain in women: It may start earlier than you think

By MAYO CLINIC NEWS NETWORK
Mayo Clinic News Network (TNS)

Dreamstime / TNS

Being aware that weight-related physical changes start earlier than midlife may help people be mindful about the importance of establishing and maintaining a healthy lifestyle, including adequate diet and exercise.

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — Weight gain is common in women during perimenopause and after menopause, but the physical changes underlying it start much earlier in adulthood. Daniela Hurtado Andrade, M.D., Ph.D., an endocrinologist and obesity expert at Mayo Clinic in Jacksonville, explains why it is important to start counteracting those changes before perimenopause arrives.

"Weight changes are not only characteristic of midlife or menopause. Data have shown that weight gain starts early in adulthood," Dr. Hurtado says. "Around age 30, your muscle mass starts decreasing gradually as part of the natural aging process, and this is exacerbated in midlife due to menopause."

The decreasing muscle mass will lead to a lower metabolism, a risk factor for weight gain, Dr. Hurtado says.

Adding to the challenge of achieving a healthy weight before and after menopause are many of the features of modern life, Dr. Hurtado says. For example, an abundance of processed foods high in sugar and fat; technology such as escalators, elevators and cars that allows people to move from place to place without walking; and the difficulty of unplugging from devices that keep people connected to work and sedentary for longer hours, with less time spent on physical activity.

Being aware that weight-related physical changes start earlier than midlife may help people be mindful about the importance of establishing and maintaining a healthy lifestyle, including adequate diet and exercise (at least 150 minutes per week), well ahead of menopause, Dr. Hurtado says. It may help to track what and how much you eat, to understand how much you need to eat to feel satisfied and avoid overeating, she adds.

To mitigate muscle mass loss that occurs with aging, a healthy diet should include enough protein and exercise should include resistance training and possibly high-intensity interval training, Dr. Hurtado says.

"And this is even more important if we are engaging in a weight-loss intervention because we know that weight-loss interventions are also associated with muscle mass loss, which can have a significant impact on the weight-loss outcomes," she says. "One of the reasons why we hit a plateau when we are losing weight is because we are losing muscle mass and our metabolism slows down."

While a healthy lifestyle is essential, it may only get someone so far in pursuit of a healthy weight, Dr. Hurtado says. The body is genetically programmed to survive, so losing weight is perceived as negative and our bodies will try to fight it. Some people can sustain low-calorie diets for a period of time and lose weight, but eventually they may start feeling hungry, eating more and gaining weight.

"As soon as some people even think about losing weight or restricting their calories, their brain overrides those thoughts: 'No, you're actually hungry, so you're going to eat as much as you need to make sure that you do not lose weight,'" Dr. Hurtado says. "There is a proportion of people in whom diet and exercise alone will work, but for the majority, they will not due to the complex regulation of energy balance."

Many people who live with overweight or obesity will need a tool such as a medication, an endoscopic bariatric procedure or bariatric surgery to help them achieve sustained weight loss, Dr. Hurtado says. In addition to nutritional and behavioral support, they also may benefit from physical therapy or occupational therapy to help them find ways to become physically active, she adds.

In the early 40s, and perhaps even earlier, it is important for women and their healthcare team to start discussing aging-related weight changes that are happening and will happen, Dr. Hurtado says.

"Every visit with a doctor is an opportunity, especially in these times when overweight and obesity are so highly prevalent," she says. "We want to prevent rather than treat something that may be more difficult to treat for several reasons. Lifestyle interventions are the core of all weight management interventions. While we need to understand that there is no magic pill, there are tools that can facilitate adhering to lifestyle changes."

Dr. Hurtado emphasizes that obesity is a disease.

"Starting the conversation about weight management with that message may help people have a different perspective: 'OK, so they are talking about something that is not my fault, but actually has a biological basis,'" Dr. Hurtado says. "Realizing that weight problems are a disease and not a character flaw can help them think about it differently and could be very impactful on the outcomes of weight loss interventions."

A growing nursing shortage is made worse by nurses' daily challenges of patients and their families rolling their eyes, yelling and striking

By CAROLYN DICKENS
Nurse practitioner and Associate Dean, University of Illinois Chicago (The Conversation)

Imagine being a dentist, and your clients roll their eyes at you, comment that you don't know what you're doing – or even spit at you.

Unimaginable, right? But that's what nurses experience when patients or their families do the eye roll or hit, bite or spit at them. What's more, a bedside nurse may repeatedly endure bad behavior from a patient or their loved ones for a shift of eight to 12 hours.

Workplace violence is frequently underreported, in part because many nurses see it as being part of their job.

Nurses experience violence and incivility due to a combination of factors, such as working in high-risk clinical environments like the emergency department, or dealing with patient-related challenges such as altered mental status. As a result, nursing is the health profession most likely to experience workplace violence, incivility or threat of violence. This includes physical violence, harassment, intimidation or other types of disruptive behavior.

A 2024 report found that more than 80 percent of registered nurses said they had experienced at least one instance of workplace violence in the previous year; 68 percent said they were verbally threatened. The vast majority of the workplace violence stemmed from patients or family members of the patient.

Workplace violence and harassment are major contributors to a growing shortfall in the nursing workforce.

An exodus from nursing

As a nurse practitioner, I work closely with nurses and interact with patients and their families on a regular basis. A nurse practitioner – which is a registered nurse but with advanced training and a wider scope of treatment – typically doesn't have as much direct interaction with patients and their families due to the difference in their job responsibilities compared with nurses.

However, I also experience incivility from patients and families when I can't give them the answers they expect to hear, or when I'm late because the time I spent with the previous patient took longer than expected.

I recognize that much of their anger and impoliteness stems from fear and frustration. I also understand the difficulty in dealing with a health care system that's bureaucratic and under-resourced. But my understanding why they feel this way does not make the behavior OK.

Workplace violence directed toward nurses has been studied for well over a decade. But the widespread prevalence of incivility remains poorly understood, in part because nurses are reluctant to report it. A 2022 survey of nurses across all care settings found that 60 percent had experienced bulling and incivility and nearly a third had experienced an incident of violence. Nearly half reported that they planned on or were considering leaving patient care in the next six months. And a significant number said that instituting a non-bullying program or no-tolerance policy toward violence would greatly improve their work satisfaction.

The feeling that they aren't supported is another reason why nurses are increasingly likely to leave the profession, with 31 percent stating in the same survey that it would help their work satisfaction if their organization would listen to them.

This is unsustainable for a number of reasons, one being the growing shortage of nurses in the U.S.. The shortfall has gotten worse since the COVID-19 pandemic, with more and more nurses leaving due to burnout.

More nurses are needed to care for the aging population in the U.S., but fewer nurses are replacing the retiring ones. Over the next decade, the U.S. is projected a shortage of more than 63,000 registered nurses to care for its aging population.

Starting from the ground up

The idealized concept of the "good nurse" is that of an unfailingly polite caregiver, always accommodating and emotionally composed. This makes it difficult for nurses to set boundaries or object to rudeness.

No one-size-fits-all solution will address the incivility problem, although health care systems have tried. Some hospitals, for example, post signs in patient rooms and elevators with messages like: "This is a place of health and healing – please respect everyone." And many health care organizations have behavioral emergency response teams – typically social workers and security personnel – to intervene when tensions escalate. Although such response teams are considered best practice, few hospitals and other health care organizations have them.

Other organizational efforts, such as resilience training and wellness lectures, are well-intended and in good faith, but they also reinforce the harmful notion that incivility is inevitable and must be endured, not addressed. Worse, they give the appearance that health care organizations are taking action. Instead, they place the burden of coping squarely on nurses, who are often unable to attend the lectures due to time constraints.

A way forward

There are some actions that health organizations can take to address the incivility directed toward nurses from families. For example, setting realistic expectations for patients and their families would decrease the frustration and change this destructive dynamic. Transparency is critical. For instance, if emergency room waiting areas have a screen showing the wait time – even if it's 12 hours – it would cut down on a great deal of anxiety for patients and their families that can escalate into anger, disrespect and violence.

And when patients must spend the night in the hospital, it would help for families to be told what time the health care provider makes their rounds so that loved ones are not needlessly waiting around for hours.

Families also deserve to know if the hospital is understaffed, with perhaps only one nurse managing multiple patients. This could help loved ones be more understanding of a slower response to a call light.

These types of interventions could be delivered through educational videos with QR codes and placed in each patient room.

The nursing profession has a conflicting identity, and it's one where some patients translate a nurse's compassion and caring into a signal to disregard basic human boundaries.

Only through organizational and societal shifts – beginning with employers – can change occur and incivility toward nurses become infrequent, rather than the norm.

Everyone can help address this problem, whether you or your loved one is hospitalized, by being understanding and respectful to others, especially when interacting with nurses.

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THE CONVERSATION

Predicting prostate cancer recurrence through AI

By MAYO CLINIC NEWS NETWORK
Mayo Clinic News Network (TNS)

ROCHESTER, Minn. — To help meet the potentially complex needs of patients after prostate cancer treatment and offer the precision and care necessary in the follow-up journey, Mayo Clinic's Department of Radiation Oncology developed the PSA Control Tower. This is an intelligent monitoring tool designed to support clinicians in keeping a close, ongoing watch over patients after treatment.

Traditionally, the follow-up care for prostate cancer patients follows a standard schedule and relies on manual review. This process can be time-consuming and may delay care due to administrative steps. Subtle but important changes in test results can be missed or recognized too late. Because of this, patients often need faster intervention and a more personalized approach to care.

Prostate cancer follow-up depends on understanding prostate-specific antigen (PSA) trends over time. Each PSA test is important, but spotting early signs of recurrence requires regular contact and ongoing monitoring. As patient numbers grow and care becomes more complex, this process can be difficult to manage. Health systems are under increasing pressure to provide reliable follow-up without adding strain to care teams.

The PSA Control Tower brings together clinical information and PSA trends, using intelligent tools to support care teams in understanding which patients may need attention and when. By bringing potential concerns to light earlier, the system helps teams stay connected to patients. Throughout the process, clinical expertise, thoughtful judgment, and human connection continue to guide every decision.

Behind the scenes, the PSA Control Tower is powered by Mayo Clinic Platform, which provides a secure environment where Mayo Clinic staff have access to large amounts of de-identified patient data. This enables teams to study patterns over time and build predictive models using information such as lab results, clinical notes, imaging and pathology.

"Our hope is that the PSA Control Tower will be a rare win-win-win for patients, physicians and hospital systems," says Mark Waddle, M.D. "The 'Control Tower' will allow each and every patient to be monitored 24/7 – for peace of mind that all patients are being followed per guidelines and that abnormal PSA values are acted upon."

As new data are introduced, the predictive models continue to learn and improve. Through Mayo Clinic Platform technology, clinicians will be able to easily view PSA trends and recurrence risk through clear dashboards, giving them timely information to support informed conversations and personalized care while keeping clinical expertise and compassion at the center.

A scalable vision for the future

The PSA Control Tower reflects Mayo Clinic's Bold. Forward. vision for precision oncology, which includes combining advanced analytics, secure data access, and seamless clinical integration. As this model expands beyond Mayo Clinic, it offers a path toward earlier detection, more efficient workflows, and scalable, data-driven follow-up care for prostate cancer patients nationwide.

"This allows our care providers to see more new patients, treat more complex patients, and focus effort related to prostate cancer follow-up on the patients that truly need their expertise and time," says Dr. Waddle.

ASK THE PEDIATRICIAN

Kratom: What parents need to know about this risky substance

By GARY KIRKILAS II, DO, FAAP and CHRISTOPHER BURESH, MD, MPH, DTM&H, FAAP, FACEP
American Academy of Pediatrics (TNS)

Lauren DeCicca / Getty Images / TNS

Teens of Thailand staff holds up a Kratom leaf on Oct. 17, 2021, in Bangkok, Thailand. Kratom comes from the leaves of the *Mitragyna* speciosa tree, native to Southeast Asia.

You may have seen Kratom products at gas stations, vape shops or online. Marketed as "natural" and often sold in forms such as powders, capsules and gummies, kratom is gaining popularity in the U.S. among teens. But while it comes from a plant, that doesn't make it safe.

Kratom comes from the leaves of the Mitragyna speciosa tree, native to Southeast Asia. Historically, kratom has been used in traditional medicines by brewing it in teas or chewing the leaves. Recently, though, kratom has grown into a large-scale industry in the United States and is now mass produced in a variety of forms.

Kratom is most commonly sold as powdered leaf-filled capsules, or as a powder that is mixed into a drink. Newer kratom products are now being sold as candy gummies in a variety of flavors. Kratom is sometimes also called biak or biak-biak, herbal speedball, kakuam, ketum, thang or thom.

Kratom is often sold in gas stations and smoke and vape shops. Many states have taken steps to make kratom illegal, but restricting its sale has proven difficult. Even in states where kratom is illegal, minors may still find it being sold in gas stations and smoke and vape shops. Teens may also purchase kratom online, since there are few age restrictions to viewing and purchasing these products.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration is concerned about kratom and continues to investigate its health effects. The FDA has banned its import into the United States but did not have enough evidence to officially classify it as a controlled substance. So, it can still be manufactured and sold in the U.S.

At low doses, kratom can make you feel like you have more energy and make you more alert, like a stimulant. It can cause a temporary feeling of happiness or euphoria, but it can also make your blood pressure very high and cause a dry mouth.

At higher doses, kratom reduces anxiety and causes sleepiness, the way strong pain drugs like opioids (heroin or fentanyl) do. In fact, like opioids, it can cause people to stop breathing at higher doses. It also can cause liver damage, hallucinations, and convulsions or seizures. Kratom has caused or contributed to dozens of deaths in the U.S. in the past decade.

Natural does not always mean safe. Many naturally occurring substances, like lead or cyanide, can be toxic if consumed even in small amounts. Kratom is no different. It binds to the very same brain receptors that opioids including heroin or fentanyl do, so it can have similar, dangerous effects. Because of this binding effect, kratom can be addictive. People who use it regularly for a while and then quit have reported withdrawal symptoms like those seen with opioids.

Kratom can lead to addiction (substance use disorder), but science does not yet show how much or how long it takes for this to happen. People who become addicted to kratom might start to feel sick if they suddenly stop taking it.

Some signs of withdrawal from kratom might include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, muscle/joint aches, restlessness, runny nose, excessive yawning, and hot or cold flashes.

There is no safe way to use kratom. Kratom products are not regulated and have more than 50 biologically active compounds in it. Some change the way your body handles other medications. That means kratom can interact with prescription drugs, causing potentially serious issues, and you can't know how strong or pure they are.

Some kratom has been contaminated with harmful bacteria like salmonella, which can cause serious illness. The FDA says kratom cannot be legally sold as a medicine, dietary supplement or food additive in the U.S. Because of these risks, kratom use is never considered safe.

If you suspect your child is using kratom, it is best to choose a time when you can have a calm discussion with them. Focus on their safety and explain that kratom can cause very serious health problems.

Partnering with a pediatrician or therapist who specializes in substance use is great next step. A pediatrician or a therapist who understands substance use can guide you and your child toward safe treatment and support.

If you know someone who may be struggling with kratom addiction, it's important to remember that addiction is a treatable illness. Medications and counseling can help people recover.

Call 988 to get local mental health and substance use resources. You can also search for treatment programs on FindTreatment.gov. You can also talk to your pediatrician. They can refer you to a substance use counselor or other specialists for support if needed.

Gary Kirkilas, DO, FAAP, is a general pediatrician at Phoenix Children's Hospital with a unique practice. His office is a 40-foot mobile medical unit that travels to various homeless shelters in Phoenix providing free medical care to families. He and his wife have four wonderful (most of the time) children and four cats

Chris Buresh MD, MPH, DTM&H, FAAP, FACEP, is a general pediatrician and emergency medicine doctor working in the emergency rooms at the University of Washington and Seattle Children's Hospital. He has been involved in education and drug user health for many years. He and his wife have four incredible kids and two big goofy dogs.

Families at Mayo Clinic explore how a smartwatch can give early warnings of severe tantrums

By MAYO CLINIC NEWS NETWORK
Mayo Clinic News Network (TNS)

Dreamstime / TNS

In a clinical trial, smartwatch alerts prompted parents to respond within four seconds on average to early signs of escalating stress. Their children's severe tantrums were shortened by about 11 minutes – roughly half the duration seen with standard therapy alone.

Evenings in the Staal household often carried a delicate unpredictability. After a full school day – and as Ethan's medication began to wear off – the shift from playful to overwhelmed could happen in seconds. Ethan has attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, a condition that can make emotional regulation especially challenging.

Ethan's feelings sometimes escalated faster than he could manage. In those difficult moments, his parents say, he became "not accessible" – often needing close to an hour before they could help guide him back to calm.

Their search for specialized care led them to Mayo Clinic, where child and adolescent psychiatrist Magdalena Romanowicz, M.D., introduced the family to Parent-Child Interaction Therapy. She also invited them to participate in a first-of-its-kind study powered by a smartwatch and artificial intelligence.

The smartwatch technology was designed to help anticipate when a child was nearing emotional overload, giving parents a chance to step in and defuse the situation before it escalated. For the Staals, the technology offered a clear sense of what was happening inside Ethan just early enough to help him through it.

"It was a game-changer," Jared Staal says. "We still have challenges, but now we see them coming and we see them through a whole different lens – we didn't always know how to support him in those moments, and now we do."

A window into the moments before escalation

During the four-month study, Ethan wore a smartwatch that tracked his heart rate, movement and sleep. When the system detected patterns that suggested his stress was building, it sent an alert to Sarah or Jared's phone.

"It gave us a warning that something was coming," Sarah says. Instead of reacting at the peak of Ethan's distress, they could intervene earlier with calm reassurance, redirection and other techniques they learned in their 12 Parent-Child Interaction Therapy sessions.

"We could help him recover in 5 to 10 minutes," she says. "And we could have our evenings again as a family."

What the study revealed

The Staals' experience reflects the study's overall findings. In the clinical trial, smartwatch alerts prompted parents to respond within four seconds on average to early signs of escalating stress. Their children's severe tantrums were shortened by about 11 minutes – roughly half the duration seen with standard therapy alone.

The broader context underscores the need for new approaches. Nearly 1 in 5 U.S. children lives with a mental, behavioral or emotional health disorder, yet the number of pediatric mental health specialists has not kept pace with demand. Smartwatch technology represents one possible way to extend support into the home by helping families recognize early changes in a child's stress levels.

Across a shared wall

The technology behind the alerts emerged from an unexpected spark.

Electrical and computer engineer Arjun Athreya, Ph.D., worked just steps from the Children's Hospital Psychiatry Unit at Mayo Clinic – a single shared wall separating his world of algorithms and data from the clinical rooms where children and their families experienced some of their hardest moments.

Passing conversations with the psychiatrists next door became more formal collaborations as the team began to ask: What happens inside a child's body in the minutes before an outburst? And could those invisible shifts be measured?

With support from Julia Shekunov, M.D., Medical Director of the inpatient unit, and help from the nursing staff, the team launched a small pilot to explore those questions.

From that work, Dr. Athreya and his team developed an AI model designed to recognize the earliest physiological changes that precede escalating behavior. That work became the foundation for the smartwatch system now being explored with families.

A family's early role in the research

One of the first families to try out the smartwatch system was Sawra and Matthew Maurer and their son, Theo.

For the Maurers, the challenges with Theo were mounting. Calls from kindergarten had become a near-weekly routine: "Theo is having a hard time. Could you come get him?" Around that same time, Theo was diagnosed with ADHD, which helped explain the emotional dysregulation and sudden behavioral shifts they were seeing.

Theo could slide from being engaged in an activity to overwhelmed in an instant – sweeping crayons off tables or having severe tantrums that sometimes required teachers to guide classmates out of the room. "It was a very difficult year," Sawra recalls.

Enrolling in the early smartwatch feasibility study gave her new insight.

During the study, Theo wore a watch each day that collected his physiological data – heart rate, movement, sleep patterns – while the family logged episodes in an AI-powered app.

That data helped researchers understand what Theo's body was doing in the moments before he became dysregulated. By matching those physiological signals with what was happening behaviorally, the team could begin identifying the subtle shifts that happen as a child moves from calm toward distress and then back to calm.

Theo's data helped teach the system what those early changes look like in real-world settings.

Sawra didn't receive alerts in that early phase, but she could see the information the watch recorded. "The idea is wonderful," she says. "Being able to detect when a child is heading toward a severe tantrum would be a phenomenal thing for a parent."

Moving the research forward

Future studies will focus on improving the model, testing the system in larger groups and examining how real-time physiological data can inform care outside the clinic. As that work continues, the experiences of families like the Staals and the Maurers will help guide how the technology evolves and how it can support children in everyday life.

Charles Fox / The Philadelphia Inquirer / TNS

Paul Offit directs the Vaccine Education Center at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

RFK Jr. is upending U.S. vaccine policy; This expert says child hospitalizations and deaths will rise result

By AUBREY WHELAN
The Philadelphia Inquirer (TNS)

PHILADELPHIA — Sweeping changes to the United States' childhood vaccine schedule announced Monday by federal officials will decrease the number of recommended childhood immunizations from 17 to 11.

Outraged pediatricians and infectious disease experts say the move will increase cases of preventable illnesses, hospitalizations, and deaths. Among the vaccines affected is an immunization for rotavirus whose co-inventor, Paul Offit, directs the Vaccine Education Center at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

Now, vaccination for the serious gastrointestinal illness is among those no longer universally recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The guidance change also affects immunizations for flu, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), meningococcal disease, hepatitis A and hepatitis B. The CDC now recommends them for children at high risk of serious illness, or when parents of otherwise healthy children decide with their doctor to give their child vaccines for these diseases.

The CDC's move is the latest in a chaotic upheaval of the nation's vaccine policy overseen by Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.

"I think the goal of RFK Jr. is to make vaccines optional," said Offit, a longtime critic of Kennedy, saying the anti-vaccine activist "is doing everything he can to make vaccines less available, less affordable, and more feared."

Other experts said the decision was made without transparency and had little scientific backing. It comes at a time when more Americans are refusing vaccines; in Pennsylvania kindergarteners' measles vaccination rates have dipped below the critical 95 percent threshold required to prevent the disease from spreading widely.

The Infectious Disease Society of America called the move "the latest reckless step in Secretary Kennedy's assault on the national vaccine infrastructure that has saved millions of lives."

Ronald G. Nahass, a New Jersey-based physician and IDSA's president, said in a statement that Kennedy's actions "put families and communities at risk and will make America sicker."

The American Academy of Pediatrics, a leading professional medical society, said it would continue to recommend that all children be vaccinated against rotavirus, hepatitis, and other diseases removed from the CDC's routine immunization list.

Under the new guidelines, the CDC will continue to recommend that all children get vaccinated for diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough or pertussis, haemophilus influenzae type b, pneumococcal conjugate, polio, measles, mumps, rubella, human papillomavirus or HPV, and chickenpox.

The agency will also recommend that children at high risk for serious complications receive vaccines for respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), hepatitis A, hepatitis B, dengue, and two meningococcal diseases.

Previously, an independent committee that advises the agency in November recommended delaying hepatitis B vaccines for newborns.

"This framework empowers parents and physicians to make individualized decisions based on risk, while maintaining strong protection against serious disease," said Mehmet Oz, a physician and administrator of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, in a statement.

Federal officials said that insurance will continue to cover vaccinations, the Associated Press reported.

Vaccine policy around the world

Offit spent 26 years developing a rotavirus vaccine after treating children with the illness during his medical residency in Pittsburgh – including one patient who died. Rotavirus causes vomiting and diarrhea that can lead to dehydration and is particularly dangerous for young children. There are two vaccines available, one of which Offit helped to develop.

"I try not to take this personally," he said of the new federal guidance.

Before rotavirus vaccines were recommended by the CDC in 2006, up to 70,000 children were hospitalized with rotavirus each year, he noted.

Within a decade, hospitalizations plummeted.

"But what we hadn't eliminated was the virus," he said.

HHS officials said that their review of worldwide vaccination policies found that the United States vaccinates for more diseases than other developed countries.

But, they said, many countries that recommend fewer vaccines still achieve "strong child health outcomes" and "maintain high vaccination rates through public trust and education rather than mandates."

Trump has touted Denmark, which recommends routine vaccinations for 10 diseases, as a potential model for the U.S.

Denmark may have better health outcomes, but it also has a national healthcare system, a lower childhood poverty level, and free childcare, Offit noted in a recent blog post.

And, he said, Denmark – which does not recommend routine rotavirus or RSV vaccination – sees children hospitalized from those viruses at higher rates than the United States.

"Denmark is nothing to emulate. They should be emulating us," Offit said.

Likewise, AAP president Andrew Racine said in a statement that America is a "unique country" with different health risks and public health infrastructure than Denmark.

"This is no way to make our country healthier," Racine said.

Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro said that the state will "continue to rely on evidence-based guidance" including vaccine recommendations from the AAP.

"RFK Jr. is once again trying to sow chaos and confusion among parents – but know this: these changes at the federal level do not affect Pennsylvanians' access to vaccines in our Commonwealth," he said in a statement. "Pennsylvanians should continue to consult with their doctors and make informed decisions based on the best scientific evidence."

New Jersey's Acting Health Commissioner Jeffrey A. Brown said in a statement that the state sets vaccine requirements for school and childcare, and that those have not changed despite shifts at the federal level. He added vaccines in the state remain covered by insurance and the state is committed to protecting residents' health.

"Federal efforts to reduce the number of vaccines recommended for all children in the United States are not supported by the available data nor the consensus of public health and medical experts," Brown said. "Instead, deterring participation in vaccination risks leaving children vulnerable to serious and preventable infections."

Changing public attitudes

In a December survey, the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania found that more than a third of 1,006 Americans polled were more likely to trust the American Medical Association, a leading professional medical society, over the CDC if the two conflicted on vaccine policy.

At the time of the survey, the CDC had recently changed its website to suggest – against decades of evidence showing otherwise – that there could be a link between vaccines and autism.

Asking the public to make their own decisions on whether to vaccinate their children can make people vulnerable to misinformation, Annenberg director Kathleen Hall Jamieson said in an interview with The Inquirer last week.

"The public doesn't have time to do research on its own, on average, and in the process, they can get lost in a mire of misinformation and confusion very easily," she said. "It's easy to think one is doing one's research when one is way down the rabbit hole."

In the poll, the preference to trust the AMA over the CDC held true across political parties and was particularly pronounced among older Americans. The only age group more likely to accept the CDC over the AMA in the event of conflicting vaccine advice was 18- to 29-year-olds.

"The fact that, as the CDC began to change statements, the public shifted its trust to other organizations on consequential issues – that's a statement that says the public intelligence is real," Jamieson said.

The AAP's Racine reiterated Monday that the society will continue to publish its own vaccine recommendations and help physicians to advise parents.

"Your child's pediatrician has the medical training, special knowledge, and scientific evidence about how to support children's health, safety, and well-being. Working together, you can make informed decisions about what's best for your child," Racine said.

Offit cautioned parents against avoiding vaccinations, as high rates do not just protect healthy children – they're also vital for children with immune disorders who cannot be vaccinated.

And, he said, parents shouldn't discount the risks of hospitalization or death from vaccine-preventable diseases.

"There's this sort of myth of invulnerability – you never think it's going to happen to you, until it happens to you," he said.

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MAYO CLINIC Q&A

What cancer screenings should I prioritize this year?

By MAYO CLINIC NEWS NETWORK
Mayo Clinic News Network (TNS)

DEAR MAYO CLINIC: A close friend of mine recently had an abnormal result on a routine Pap test that led to a cancer diagnosis. I know cancer screenings are important, but it's hard to keep track of which ones I should prioritize. Could you help me better understand cervical cancer screening and other screenings I should consider now?

ANSWER: Cancer screenings play a critical role in protecting long-term health. They can detect cancer early, when treatment is most effective, and in some cases help prevent cancer before it develops. While screening recommendations vary based on age, sex, family history and personal risk factors, several key cancer screening tests should be reviewed regularly.

Cervical cancer screening is an important part of preventive care and has helped significantly reduce deaths from this disease. Understanding how screening works can help people stay up to date.

Cervical cancer: Why screening is essential

Cervical cancer is most often caused by long-term infection with certain high-risk types of human papillomavirus (HPV). HPV is common, and while most of these infections are cleared by a person's immune system, other HPV infections can persist for years without causing symptoms. People also can become infected with HPV more than once in their lifetime. That's why routine screening is the best way to detect abnormal changes early.

The Pap test and HPV test

During a Pap test, a healthcare professional gently collects cells from the cervix, which is the lower part of the uterus that opens into the vagina. These cells are examined for abnormal changes that could develop into cancer if left untreated. The test is usually quick and can be done during a routine gynecologic visit.

An HPV test is often done at the same time as a Pap test using the same cell sample, and it checks for high-risk types of HPV that are most likely to lead to cervical cancer.

Cervical cancer screening does more than look for cancer. Pap tests and HPV tests can identify precancerous changes in the cervix. When these changes are found and treated early, cervical cancer often can be prevented.

Cervical cancer screening recommendations

AGES 21 TO 29: A Pap test every three years.

AGES 30 TO 65: Several screening options may be appropriate: HPV test alone every five years. Pap test every three years. combined Pap and HPV (called co-testing) testing every five years.

OVER AGE 65: Some people may be able to stop screening if they have consistently normal Pap or co-test results and no history of severe cervical precancer. The decision to stop cervical cancer screening should always be made together with a healthcare professional.

If a Pap or HPV test shows abnormal results, additional evaluation may be recommended. This can include repeat testing, a colposcopy – a cervical exam done by a clinician using a special magnifying scope – or a cervical biopsy. While abnormal results can be concerning, they often detect changes long before cancer develops, allowing for effective treatment and careful follow-up.

Other cancer screenings to review this year

Vitali Michkou / Dreamstime / TNS

Depending on age and personal risk factors, other cancer screenings also may be recommended. A healthcare professional can help determine which screenings you should schedule.

Breast cancer screening with mammography is advised for many people beginning at midlife.

Low-dose CT screening for lung cancer for those with a significant history of smoking may be appropriate every year.

Colorectal cancer screening is recommended for most adults beginning at midlife and sometimes earlier for those with a family history or other risk factors. Screening options include colonoscopy and stool-based tests. These screenings can detect colorectal cancer at an early stage or remove precancerous polyps before they develop into cancer.

Anal cancer is less common, but it's also associated with HPV infection. Routine screening isn't recommended for the general population. However, people with certain risk factors, such as a weakened immune system or a history of HPV-related precancers or cancers, may benefit from closer monitoring. Symptoms, including rectal bleeding, pain, itching or a lump, should always be evaluated by a healthcare professional.

Make screening part of your routine

An annual visit with a primary care clinician or gynecologist is a good opportunity to review your screening history, discuss vaccines and address new symptoms or concerns. Keeping track of when your last Pap test, HPV test, mammogram or colorectal screening occurred can help ensure that care isn't delayed.

Cervical Cancer Awareness Month is an important reminder that prevention works. Through regular screening and timely follow-up, cervical cancer is one of the most preventable cancers. Taking a proactive approach to screenings this year can help protect health now and in the future.

– Jamie Bakkum-Gamez, M.D., Gynecological Oncologist, Mayo Clinic, Rochester, Minnesota

FINANCE

Daniel Slim / AFP / Getty Images / TNS

The U.S. Federal Reserve on Dec. 12, 2021, in Washington D.C.

The Fed didn't cut interest rates

Here are 5 things to watch next

By SARAH FOSTER
Bankrate.com (TNS)

The Federal Reserve left interest rates alone at its first meeting of the year, keeping borrowing costs at a multiyear high for Americans as policymakers grow more cautious.

The decision means Fed policymakers will keep their benchmark rate in a target range of 3.5-3.75 percent, pausing a recent string of three rate cuts that began in September 2025. While borrowing costs are down sharply from their July 2023 peak of 5.25-5.5 percent, they remain higher than they were in the decade leading up to the pandemic.

The big question now: What will it take to get the Fed moving again? Inflation has shown little improvement over the past 18 months and remains above the Fed's 2 percent target, while the unemployment rate has edged lower.

Before restarting rate cuts, policymakers will likely want to see convincing evidence that either inflation is retreating back to 2 percent or that the labor market is starting to lose more steam, according to Former Cleveland Fed President Loretta Mester.

"The Fed is in a very good position to hold for a while and see how the economy actually evolves," says Mester, who is now an adjunct professor at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. "The labor market has stabilized, and they need to keep policy a bit restrictive to help inflation move back down to 2 percent. It's a good time to wait."

Policymakers may not see rate cuts as urgent, but Americans aren't feeling much better about their own economic prospects. The job market is not as robust as it was a few years ago – and feels much worse than it looks on paper. Hiring is at its weakest since 2013, when the unemployment rate was above 7 percent, according to Labor Department data. By comparison, joblessness currently sits at 4.4 percent. At the same time, prices are rising again for many of the essential items households can't cut out, such as groceries, electricity and heating costs.

Another open question is how much the Fed could cut rates. The Fed is holding interest rates steady amid unprecedented political pressure from President Donald Trump, who is expected to soon name his pick for the next Fed chair – another layer that complicates how clearly policymakers can signal what comes next.

Bankrate's annual Interest Rate Forecast estimates another three cuts worth 0.75 percentage points in 2026. Investors are betting that the Fed will cut interest rates twice in 2026, starting in June, according to CME Group's FedWatch tool, and Fed policymakers see just one cut this year.

Here are five things to know about the Fed's pause and the steps you should take with the Fed on hold.

Here's an inside look at all of the shifting forces that could alter how much the Fed lowers interest rates in 2026.

Mortgage rates could fall before the Fed cuts again – but there's a catch

The Fed doesn't directly set mortgage rates. Instead, those longer-term borrowing costs tend to move with the 10-year Treasury yield, which rises and falls based on expectations for economic growth and inflation in the years ahead.

That means prospective homebuyers don't need a Fed rate cut to see relief. Mortgage rates can – and often do – fall before the central bank's. Case in point: Rates dropped more than 40 basis points over a four-week span in September 2024, even though the Fed hadn't yet begun cutting borrowing costs, according to Bankrate data.

"Mortgage rates are a focal point for both aspiring and current homeowners, and they are also an area of interest for the White House," Kates says. "There is little the Federal Reserve can do to push these borrowing rates meaningfully lower."

But what usually drives those moves is a shift in the outlook. Concerns about a slowing economy can pull long-term rates lower, while expectations of stronger growth or stickier inflation tend to push them higher.

Mortgage rates in 2026 could fluctuate for those reasons. They're expected to bounce between a low of 5.7 percent and a high of 6.5 percent as the landscape shifts, according to Bankrate's annual forecast.

Not to mention, lower mortgage rates might not be a panacea for Americans' housing affordability struggles. If lower rates fuel more demand for housing, prices could start to increase in some markets.

"Even if mortgage rates come down a bit, it doesn't mean the overall price of the house is going to go down," says Ross Bramwell, CFA, managing director of investment communications at HB Wealth. "Until you have a larger supply of homes, it's unlikely home prices come down anytime soon."

For now, Bankrate's weekly rate survey shows that the average interest rate on a 30-year fixed mortgage is 6.25 percent. Borrowers with strong credit, however, can often secure even better deals, with the lowest weekly offers tracked by Bankrate currently around 5.6 percent as of Jan. 28.

Many borrowers don't have to wait on lower interest rates from the Fed for relief

Make no mistake: Interest rates are still likely headed down at some point. The Fed's three expected rate cuts this year could push auto loan rates to their lowest level since 2023, according to Bankrate's annual forecast calls. Home equity loans and home equity lines of credit (HELOCs) could fall to their lowest since 2022.

But borrowers can't always time the market. If your car breaks down or your home needs an urgent repair, you may have no choice but to take out a loan before rates fall. Not to mention, rates might not offer much relief on certain big-ticket or high-rate purchases, such as cars and credit card borrowing.

With the average price of a new vehicle topping a record $52,000 in December, many borrowers are locked into hefty monthly payments. Nearly 17 percent of new car payments now exceed $1,000, according to Experian's quarterly State of the Automotive Finance Market report. And credit card rates have fallen just enough to save the average credit card borrower about $6 a month, according to Bankrate calculations.

The good news: Borrowers still have ways to save on interest rates. Boosting your credit score is among the most effective steps you can take to secure a lower rate, with lenders offering substantial differences to those across the credit spectrum. For those with a credit card balance, a balance transfer card can offer a temporary interest rate as low as 0 percent.

Savers who keep their cash in a high-yield account will still have the upper hand

The longer the Fed stays on hold, the better the news for savers. Just as lenders lower borrowing costs when the Fed cuts interest rates, banks also tend to reduce how much they pay depositors – if you're parking your cash in a high-yield online bank, that is. Traditional brick-and-mortar banks have barely adjusted yields at all in the years since the Fed began raising interest rates.

When borrowing costs were at a more-than-two-decade high, the top bank on the market paid savers as much as 5.55 percent in interest. Today, Bankrate data shows the best savings accounts offer about a 4.2 percent annual percentage yield (APY).

A Fed on hold may keep those returns from falling as quickly. By the end of the year, the top savings rate is expected to fall closer to 3.7 percent, while the national average slips to about 0.45 percent, according to Bankrate's annual forecast.

The stock market is soaring, but don't be afraid of volatility

The Fed's rate cuts and an optimistic outlook for the economy are currently fueling a rally in the stock market. The S&P 500 closed at a record high on Tuesday and is already up about 2 percent to start the year. Looking ahead, strategists at Goldman Sachs expect the index to climb another 12 percent in 2026.

That tune, however, can change in an instant. Bankrate's latest Economic Indicator Survey expects another year of above-trend growth, but the risks of a recession aren't zero.

For long-term investors, market pullbacks can create meaningful buying opportunities, particularly at a time when stock valuations are expensive by historical standards.

If you're nervous about a downturn in the market, consider it a prime time to review your asset allocation, maintain a diversified portfolio and speak with a financial adviser. Remember: Volatility in the market is the price Americans pay for inflation-beating returns over time.

"For the most part, if the Fed pauses for three months, six months, a year, it shouldn't really influence what people are doing," says Brian Walsh, CFP and head of advice and planning at SoFi. "The biggest thing for everyday people that we talk to right now is just making sure they don't let uncertainty or potential changes stop them from taking action in their personal finances right now."

Rate cuts were meant to help job seekers, but workers may have to keep waiting

Joblessness might be low by historical standards, but few workers would describe this job market as strong. U.S. employers added just 584,000 jobs last year, down from 2 million in 2024 and representing the fewest jobs created in any year outside a recession since 2003, according to Labor Department data.

Young workers, recent graduates and people early in their careers are bearing the brunt of that slowdown, as companies pull back on entry-level positions and hire those with more experience.

The job market might not improve much in the near future. Economists expect the unemployment rate to edge up to 4.5 percent by the end of 2026, with employers adding just 64,500 jobs a month on average over the next year, per Bankrate's latest Economic Indicator Survey.

Complicating matters further, some of the forces weighing on the labor market – like stricter immigration or tariffs – may be beyond the Fed's reach, according to Mester.

That uneasy backdrop helps explain why Fed policymakers are divided over what comes next. Rate cuts that could support hiring also risk reigniting price pressures, leaving policymakers caught between their two mandates.

"It's not as vibrant of a labor market as you'd like, but that's because of the policies that have been put onto this economy, not anything a Fed tool like the fed funds rate can address," Mester says. "In an environment this difficult to read, I don't think it's very unusual or surprising that you'd have different views. If everyone agreed, I'd be worried they're not working at things as robustly as they should."

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FOOD

You really should eat more beans

HERE ARE 3 RECIPES TO GET YOU STARTED

By BETH DOOLEY
The Minnesota Star Tribune (TNS)

Let's be clear: canned beans are simply not as tasty as the dried beans you cook yourself.

Yes, canned beans are convenient, speedy and nutritious. But cooking dried beans is much easier than you think. First of all, you do not need to soak dried beans overnight. Second, beans cooked from scratch create their own broth to use in soups, stews and sauces.

The book "Cool Beans: The Ultimate Guide to Cooking with the World's Most Versatile Plant-Based Protein" from food writer Joe Yonan smashes a lot of bean myths. Don't soak! Do salt! Yes, most beans take three or more hours of simmering, but it's all unattended. (Pressure cookers like Instant Pots can speed up the process.) The end result will be firm-textured, silky beans deliciously enhanced with the herbs and aromatics that have shared the pot.

Beans are among the oldest and most universal source of protein. They are a staple pantry item in the homes of cooks across the globe – Mexico, India, Nigeria, Israel, China, Italy, Japan, Spain, Morocco, Peru. Finally, thanks to the growing interest in plant-based proteins, they're catching on here.

The Midwest Heartland region – Minnesota, North Dakota and Michigan – is the nation's largest producer of dried beans. The farmland's rich soils and long, cool growing season are especially well-suited to pinto, kidney and black beans. Plus, these crops are also good for the land. Beans are "nitrogen fixers" that improve the soil's fertility, prevent runoff into our waters, capture carbon and shelter pollinators.

Beans are immensely affordable, uniquely adaptable and flexible. Categorized as both a protein and a vegetable, they're extremely nutritious, packed with antioxidants and heart-healthy fibers, are far lower in calories than animal proteins, and contain no fat. Their benefits also may be a dietary key to a long and healthy life, according to Blue Zone founder Dan Buettner.

Black Bean Sweet Potato Chili
Serves 4 to 6

This rich, satisfying chili is just right for a wintry night. It comes together in less than an hour (assuming you've already cooked the beans). Feel free to switch out the black beans for kidney or pinto beans, and don't forget all the accompaniments.

2 to 3 tbsp. vegetable oil
1 onion, finely chopped
2 cloves garlic, smashed
Coarse salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
2 tbsp. maple syrup
3 tsp. ground cumin
1 c. bean stock, vegetable stock or water
2 chipotles in adobo with their sauce, or to taste
1 lb. sweet potatoes, scrubbed and cut into 1-in. pieces
1 (28-oz.) can diced fire-roasted tomatoes
2 tbsp. fresh lime juice
Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
5 c. cooked black beans (see How to Cook Beans above)
Chopped cilantro, for garnish
Sliced avocado, shredded Cheddar cheese, corn chips, for serving

Film a large heavy pot with the oil and set over medium heat. When the oil begins to ripple, add the onion and garlic, season with salt and pepper, and cook until translucent, about 2 to 3 minutes. Stir in the maple syrup, cumin and stock and bring to a simmer. Add the chipotles and sauce, sweet potatoes, tomatoes and lime juice. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Increase the heat and bring to a boil.

Reduce the heat to a simmer, cover the pot, and cook until the sweet potatoes are tender, about 30 to 40 minutes; stir in the cooked beans and continue cooking another 3 to 5 minutes. Taste and adjust the seasonings. Serve garnished with the cilantro and pass the avocado, cheese and corn chips alongside.

Moroccan Bean, Squash and Tomato Stew
Serves 4 to 6

This hearty, simple vegetarian stew is comfort in a bowl. Hunks of squash add a sweet earthiness to the vibrant notes of ras el hanout, a complex and aromatic spice blend available in many supermarkets. This Moroccan seasoning of cumin, coriander, turmeric, cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves, ginger and pepper is well worth keeping on hand. Serve this fragrant stew with plenty of pita to sop up all the goodness left in the bowl.

2 tbsp. olive oil
2 medium onions, halved and sliced
3 cloves garlic, smashed
1/4 c. chopped parsley, plus more for garnish
1 red pepper, seeded and cut into 2-in. pieces
1 c. peeled, cubed butternut squash, sweet potato or carrot
2 to 3 tbsp. ras el hanout (see Tip below)
Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
2 c. bean or vegetable stock, more as needed
1/4 c. tomato paste
5 to 6 c. cooked pinto or white beans (see How to Cook Beans above)
1 to 2 tbsp. lemon juice, to taste
Pepitas, for garnish

Film a large deep pot with oil and set over medium heat. Add the onions, garlic, parsley, red pepper, squash and ras el hanout, and season generously with salt and pepper. Stir the vegetables with the spices and cook until fragrant, about 3 to 5 minutes. Stir in the stock and tomato paste, bring to a boil, then reduce the heat and simmer until the squash is tender, about 15 minutes.

Stir in the beans and lemon juice and continue cooking until the flavors have combined and the beans are heated through. Taste and adjust the seasonings. Serve garnished with pepitas and additional parsley.

Tip: Substitute ras el hanout by using 2 teaspoons ground cumin, 1 teaspoon ground coriander, 1 teaspoon paprika, 2 teaspoons ground ginger, 1 teaspoon cinnamon, 1 teaspoon ground nutmeg and a generous pinch of cayenne or cloves.

Lemony Pasta, White Beans and Olives
Serves 4 to 6

Braising cooked beans with good olive oil, garlic and lemon turns the classic Italian Pasta e Fagioli (pasta and beans) into a speedy, robust one-dish dinner. Black olives add a fine umami boost to the velvety beans. Serve the pasta with a crisp green salad and hunks of rustic bread.

1 lb. pasta of choice
1/4 c. extra-virgin olive oil, plus more as needed
2 large shallots, thinly sliced
4 cloves garlic, smashed
1/4 c. chopped kale
1/4 tsp. crushed red pepper, plus more as needed
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
5 to 6 c. cooked cannellini beans
1/2 c. bean stock or vegetable stock, or more as needed
Zest and juice of 1 lemon
1/2 c. pitted black olives, chopped
1 1/4 c. chopped parsley
1/4 c. grated Parmesan cheese, plus more for finishing

Cook the pasta in a large pot of heavily salted water until tender but still firm, about 10 to 12 minutes. Drain and set aside.

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Generously grease a baking dish with oil.

Film a large deep skillet with the 1/4 cup of oil and add the shallots, garlic, kale, red pepper flakes and salt and pepper. Cook until the kale is wilted and tender, about 3 to 5 minutes. Stir in the beans and toss to coat with the vegetables, then stir in the stock and simmer for 3 to 5 minutes. Add the lemon zest and juice, olives, parsley, then fold in the pasta, adding more stock as needed. Fold in the cheese.

Transfer the pasta to the baking dish. Sprinkle with more Parmesan and bake until the cheese is nicely melted, about 3 to 4 minutes. Serve garnished with a drizzle of oil and a pinch of red pepper flakes.

Beth Dooley is the author of "The Perennial Kitchen." Find her at bethdooleyskitchen.com.

How to cook beans

When cooking beans, there are a few simple basics to remember:

- Put the beans into the pot and add enough water to cover them by about 3 inches.
- Add about 1 tablespoon of salt to 1 pound of beans.
- Add aromatics to the pot: a few cloves of garlic, a small onion, bay leaf, herbs, a few peppercorns.
- Do not add tomatoes or acids until the very end; they tend to harden the beans and slow the cooking.
- Set the pot over high heat, bring to a boil, reduce the heat, cover, and simmer until done. Start checking the beans after about 2 hours, although they may take longer. When they are tender and creamy, remove from heat.
- Store cooked beans in their broth in the refrigerator for up to a week or freeze.
- 1 pound of dried beans will yield 5 to 6 cups of cooked beans, plus 2 to 3 cups stock.
- 1 can of beans is equal to 1 to 2 cups cooked beans, depending on the size of the beans and the size of the can.

Cooking dried beans is much easier than you think.
Dreamstime / TNS

ENTERTAINMENT

How Don Was returned to his Detroit roots for fresh musical inspiration

By PETER LARSEN
The Orange County Register (TNS)

ANAHEIM, Calif. — When the jazz trumpeter and composer Terence Blanchard invited his friend, the musician-producer Don Was, to headline a night at a jazz series Blanchard was curating for the Detroit Symphony in 2024, Was said yes – even though he didn't actually have a band or any songs at the time.

"Then I had to think about what to do," says Was, who in the '80s recorded and toured with the eclectic rock-jazz band Was (Not Was) before shifting his focus to producing. "And I flashed back to the early '90s when I was just getting started as a producer.

"I got on a roll with a lot of my heroes in very short order," he says during a recent phone call. " Bob Dylan, Brian Wilson, Keith Richards, Willie Nelson, Kris Kristofferson, Leonard Cohen. The great writers of our time, I think.

"And one of the byproducts of that was it gave me a severe case of writer's block for about five years," Was says. "Every time I sat down at a piano it started up. I just though, 'What is the point of this when Brian Wilson lives a mile away. Let's just give him the lyrics.'"

Then one day, while in a recording studio with Willie Nelson, an epiphany arrived.

"I was again lamenting the fact that I can never be Willie Nelson, and then the converse struck me," Was says. "But Willie Nelson can never be you.

"He didn't drop acid and go see the MC5 at the Grande Ballroom," he says of his early life as a native of Detroit, where he was born in 1952. "And George Clinton didn't play a sock hop at his junior high school. He didn't go see the Motown Revue as a 12-year-old when they played for 200 people at a Saturday matinee."

Was thought about the old music business adage "that says if you're different from whatever was fashionable, you're a marketing problem," but decided to flip that on its head.

"It struck me that no, actually the thing that makes you different is your superpower as an artist," Was says. "Everyone should cultivate that. I tried to impart that to artists I was producing or artists on Blue Note [Records, the iconic jazz label he's been president of since 2011.]

"So I decided to just take my own advice and if I had to put a band together, be yourself," he says. "I'm going to go back to Detroit, play with musicians who grew up listening to the same radio stations, played the same bars, played with the same musicians, for the same audiences, and find some people who spoke the common musical languages of Detroit.

"So that's what I did."

The eight musicians he gathered included some he'd played with for 45 years, such as saxophonist Dave McMurray and keyboardist Luis Resto, who'd worked in Was (Not Was). Trombonist Vincent Chandler, trumpeter John Douglas, drummer Jeff Canady, percussionist Mahindi, guitarist Wayne Gerard, and vocalist Steffanie Christi'an fill out the group.

The familiarity was instantaneous.

"We got together one day, and in the first 10 minutes it sounded like we've been playing together for a decade," he says. "There was this commonality of experience and roots."

Don Was and the Pan-Detroit Ensemble played the jazz show that Blanchard had booked for them. And then, they kept playing shows. The group released the album "Groove in the Face of Adversity" in 2024 and is currently on tour.

In an interview edited for length and clarity, Was talked about his musical roots in Detroit, how the ensemble embodies the city's disparate musical roots, why the group decided to play a 50-year-old Grateful Dead album in full at their shows, and more.

Q: So were George Clinton and Parliament still wearing suits, not the wild Funkadelic clothes, at your junior high?

A: No, that was the thing. They were still a five-piece vocal band called the Parliaments, but they showed up dressed like hippies. And they weren't taking cues from [Jimi] Hendrix. It was synchronous. There was just something in the zeitgeist for R&B groups to start learning from some of the rock and roll ethos. And it blew everybody's mind.

"They came and lip-synched "(I Wanna) Testify.' Back in those days, it was a form of payola. A local disc jockey would get a gig paying 200 bucks to emcee a school dance, and if you wanted him to play your song, you'd show up for free and plug your single, and then he'd play your song. That's what George was doing.

The weird thing is that it was at Clinton Junior High School." [He laughs] But you were going to ask about the essence of Detroit music?

Q: Yeah, I don't know if it's more varied than any other city, but it goes from blues and jazz to Motown, which was groundbreaking, to MC5, the Stooges, all the way to the White Stripes. So what makes Detroit music?

A: You grew up in this jambalaya of musical styles and learned to respect them, and become aware that there are other ways of playing something. And you ended up incorporating that into what you did, I think. It was an openness to ignoring the boundaries of genre, which are really only useful if you're organizing a record store. It's not how musicians actually play and operate.

So there's that, but then there's also the fact that it's a one-industry town and it's a working-class town. Everybody's fate is tied to the success or failure of the auto business, or was certainly back then. It creates a more honest, no [bleep] population.

That kind of raw honesty permeates the music. I say John Lee Hooker has been the [prime] exponent of Detroit music because it's so raw. You almost think it's going to fall apart, but it never does. In fact, it grooves like crazy. It's got a deep groove, and he's just for real. It's honest and raw.

And that's what the people are like. If you really follow all the different streams of music that came out, whether, as you pointed out, it's Mitch Ryder and MC5 and the Stooges and the White Stripes, or in R&B, Fortune Records and Motown and J Dilla. And jazz, Elvin Jones and Joe Henderson. They all had that raw honesty to what they were doing.

Q: On "Groove in the Face of Adversity," there's one song you wrote and then covers of songs by Curtis Mayfield, Hank Williams, Kenny Barron, and a New Zealand band, Fat Freddy's Drop. How do they all become Detroit music when you play them?

A: There's a type of groove we play. I don't know really how to describe it, but you can recognize it when you hear it. The proof is in – like, in the middle of the set we're playing the Grateful Dead album "Blues for Allah" in its entirety.

[The late Grateful Dead guitarist-singer Bobby Weir formed the Wolf Brothers with Was and drummer Jay Lane in 2018. We spoke with Was three days before Weir's death on Jan. 10, 2026.] It's sandwiched between our own songs, and if you didn't know the Grateful Dead or our own repertoire, I don't think you'd know when we started playing "Blues for Allah" in the show. If we told you they were all originals, you'd probably believe it, because we try to approach it not to do karaoke versions of the songs, but how does this band play them?

Are you a Deadhead? There's a song on "Blues for Allah" called "King Solomon's Marbles." To be honest, I always thought it was just an improvised jam in a crazy time signature. Only when I got into it, I realized there's a real structure underneath it that triggered the way we should approach it.

It's that at the beginning they kind of quote "Inner City Blues," Marvin Gaye. [He sings a bit of that song's signature riff.] That riff starts out the song on "Blues for Allah," so all right, there's something we can relate to [as Detroit musicians]. So we put a groove like "Inner City Blues" underneath the whole song, but we play the song correctly and stretch out on it.

We found a way to play that song and be ourselves, which I think is the goal for every musician.

Q: Has Bobby seen the group play "Blues for Allah" or heard it? Or any of the other guys from the Dead?

A: They know we're doing it. I wanted to wait until I had a really good recording. I know he's seen like YouTube audience stuff. He's been super positive about it.

Q: Let me ask about the one original song, "You Asked, I Came."

A: That comes from a movie score that I did in the '90s for a movie called "Backbeat," which is about the Beatles in Hamburg before they became famous. [Was won a BAFTA for that score in 1994.] It was kind of a cool film because we put a band together to play the tracks for the actors to be the Beatles.

It was Dave Grohl [of Foo Fighters] and Dave Pirner [of Soul Asylum]. Thurston Moore from Sonic Youth, and Mike Mills [from REM] played bass. We just got together and jammed out these Beatles' covers that they used to play in Hamburg. And they wanted a jazz score to contrast it because they were on the fringe of the Hamburg beatnik scene.

So that was a song from the score, and we'd never been able to play it, so it's nice to be able to pull it out and do it for the first time. But we just picked cool songs that they felt like playing. Kind of trying to figure out what the band was, who are we, and how far can we stretch?

Q: As far as the title, "Groove in the Face of Adversity," I read that it goes back to a moment you had as a kid with your mom and a Joe Henderson song on the radio?

A: You're correct in referring to that incident. I was driving around with my mom on a Saturday. She's making me run errands with her when I wanted to be with my friends, and I was being a real [bleep] as 14-year-olds are going to be.

She just left me in the car with the keys and said, 'Play the radio.' So I landed on a Detroit jazz station that I didn't even know existed at that time. And that came right at the top of the solo, where you can hear it. He goes [Was sings a bit of Henderson's solo on "Mode for Joe"] and the sound of that horn, I'd never heard anyone evoke that feeling with the saxophone before.

I was startled because it matched the angst I was feeling, being stuck driving around with my mom. But then [drummer] Joe Chambers kicks in, and in about 20 seconds Joe [Henderson] falls into the pocket and he's grooving.

And I thought he was speaking to me. I thought the message was you've got to groove in the face of adversity, Don, you know, be nicer to your mom, and be good company. And it worked. In about three minutes, my mood changed 180 degrees, and I realized, Whoa, this music had the power to do that? And there weren't even lyrics on it?

I found groove in the face of adversity to be such a succinct message, something that really helps. Like any time you're facing some kind of wall, grooving through it is an effective way of dealing with it. Never losing your cool or your poise, but staying firm in your goals and your direction.

Q: That's a great story. Something we can all probably use.

A: In crazy times like these, I think it's maybe more relevant than it ever was. I don't care what end of the political spectrum you find yourself on, it's equally relevant to everybody.

These are stressful, chaotic, confusing times, and the best way through it is to find human connection. You can groove this country back together.

Q: Wouldn't that be nice?

A: If you have doubts about it, you can go to a Willie Nelson show and see it in action. You get one of everything at his shows. There's never a fight in the audience, and there's nothing polarized at a Willie Nelson show. Everyone is experiencing a kind of collective joy.

Same thing at a Grateful Dead show, really. I've seen former Black Panthers at Grateful Dead shows, and I've seen Ann Coulter at a Grateful Dead show.

Q: I would not have guessed she was a fan –

A: – Oh yeah. Yeah, I mean, Donald Trump went to a Grateful Dead show once. I think he introduced him at one. I don't remember if it was Grateful Dead or Weir and RatDog. [It was a RatDog show in 2006.]

But that's the point of music. Certainly, the point of our show was this. We want people to feel like they're part of the fabric of humanity and that we're all connected.

It's something I really learned with Bobby [Weir]. It's that the audience is so tuned into the thing that if you let them become part of the band, and you feel their reaction, and you let that impact the choice of the next notes that you play, you get this kind of collective ecstasy, is what it is, and it would blow the roof off the place.

It's why, at 73 years old, it's all I want to do [is make music with the Pan-Detroit Ensemble]. I'm happy to just go on and play it and experience that for the rest of my life, man. I don't know anything better than that.

Musician-producer Don Was sits on the Orchestra Hall stage in Detroit on May 16, 2024.
Robin Buckson / The Detroit News / TNS

MOVIE REVIEW

Amazon MGM Studios / T NS

Melania Trump as seen in the documentary "Melania."

Made of car rides and cold silences, *'Melania'* is so polished it slips out of the first lady's hands

By AMY NICHOLSON
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

I'm hesitant to call "Melania" propaganda because I can't imagine anyone watching this movie and thinking that Melania Trump comes off well. If this vapid, airless, mindless time-waster had subversive designs of being a satire about the first lady of the United States, there's not much it would have changed. Yet somehow, "Melania" is exactly the film that the first lady wanted to make – her company was paid $40 million for the rights to this self-greenlit production – and no one around her warned that it was a very expensive bad idea.

"Melania" didn't screen for critics and, of the dozen people in my AMC theater on opening day last Friday, half of us were journalists paying to play catch-up. Introducing "Melania" at its Kennedy Center premiere the night before, the lead herself insisted that it is not a documentary but a "very deliberate act of authorship inviting you to witness events and emotions through a window of rich imagery." Mostly, it's B-roll of Melania stepping in and out of SUVs. My best guess is her pay rate is a million dollars an hour.

The president is effusive the first time that he greets his wife on an airplane tarmac alongside the film crew. "A movie star!" Trump says with a grin. He has a couple reasons to sound happy. For one, he's getting to actually make public eye contact with his wife. As a bonus, she even offers up her cheek for a peck, which is as affectionate as things get between them.

With the same queenly beneficence she grants her husband, Melania has allowed the long-out-of-work director Brett Ratner (this is his first film since six women accused him of sexual assault in 2017) access to film her in tightly constrained snippets until the day after her return to the White House. It is 2025 and Trump will be sworn back into office as the 47th president of the U.S. in 20 days – or is it 13? One attempts to measure the passage of time in her outfit changes – a white jacket, shiny black leggings, a tight leather pencil skirt – although the exact numbers blur when Melania attempts to count them.

In terse, precise narration that provides most of our chances to hear her voice, Melania says that this will be a movie about "family, business, philanthropy and becoming first lady of the United States, again." The latter, yes. Otherwise that proves to be a checklist of several things the movie scarcely touches on at all.

An intimate portrait, this is not. There's no mention of how she and Trump fell in love and no words are exchanged with her stepchildren Ivanka, Tiffany, Eric and Donald Jr., not even to dispel rumors about their frosty relationship. Melania does gaze fondly at her son Barron on a couple of television screens and predicts he will grow up to have "ultimate success." The only time I remember them speaking is a goodbye as he turns his back to lope down a hallway.

You become well-acquainted with her stiletto Louboutins and her silent, hunky blond bodyguard. We do witness insider White House events, like the five-hour window used to swap out all of Biden's furniture for Trump's, a breakneck turnaround accompanied by a panic of violins. As for witnessing emotions, though, Melania's inexpressive voice-over assures us that her guarded surface contains deep empathy for humankind.

"Everyone should do what we can to protect our individual rights," Melania says. "No matter where we come from, we are bound by the same humanity." Indeed, this isn't a documentary – a black comedy, perhaps? In another scene, Melania silently watches news footage of the 2025 Los Angeles fires alone on a couch while informing us that it's "impossible to see these images and not be devastated." Bless her heart, she tries.

The first lady doesn't mention politics other than to briefly say that it's a shame so many people seem to wish her husband harm. Otherwise, she shares her precise opinions on every object she drinks from, sits on or wears. The opening finds her futzing over the neckline of her inauguration day blouse before telling the tailors to slice into the fabric with scissors. This outfit will be in a museum someday, she says. She's not wrong, although the most compelling thing about that moment is witnessing how exceedingly agreeable everyone is in her orbit. One whispers, "I don't think we can cut it, though," once she glides out of the room.

"Melania" plays like a sizzle reel for her post-political (post-spousal?) future career in which she may rouse herself to be a guest judge on a reality competition show. She reminds us of her education in architecture and her Slovenia-to-Rome-to-Manhattan modeling path during which she gained confidence approving or disapproving of various fabrics, as well as the pride she took last term in renovating the Rose Garden (now paved) and decorating the East Wing (now demolished). Her dress designer fashions the closest thing the film has to a metaphor for Melania herself: a gown constructed with no visible seams. "A mystery," he beams.

On camera, Melania barely talks to anyone besides her employees, a few of whom pick up on the Bravo Channel-style of the film and dutifully recite her opinions on her behalf, like when her event planner David Mann shows her the inauguration invitations and compliments them for being printed in "the color red … which you chose." I experienced a secondhand childhood shiver of being prompted to write a thank-you note. (In fairness, Melania tells people "thank you" often.)

One of her helpers, who moved to the States from Laos at the age of 2, beams that her proximity to the first lady "really is the American dream." Both women are immigrants, the film notes, although it doesn't mention the Trump administration's feelings about that. It's worth noting that last year, the United States deported several hundred Laotian refugees back to their homeland, many of whom arrived here as toddlers after the Vietnam War. As for Slovenians, it deported three.

Halfway through "Melania's" 104-minute running time, it occurred to me that it would feel scandalous if Ratner so much as taped her doing something as human and unguarded as eating a bite of food. Melania does, however, approve of Mann's suggestion that she serve an appetizer of caviar-topped golden eggs. "White and gold is you," he assures her, although – drama alert – she later admits that her favorite colors are actually white and black.

The other scintillating confession comes in the back of an SUV when Ratner drags it out of Melania that her favorite musician is Michael Jackson. He follows up that revelation by asking her to name her favorite song. "Billie Jean," she replies. We've already heard that hit on the soundtrack, which also features needle drops by the Rolling Stones, Aretha Franklin and Elvis. (They must have gobbled up a portion of the film's otherwise confounding price tag.) Someone also selected a piece from the score of "Phantom Thread," the Paul Thomas Anderson drama about an underdog immigrant wife who poisons her much older spouse.

Nevertheless, the unseen chauffeur cues "Billie Jean" again on the stereo. Melania lip syncs. It's the film's action spectacular.Documentary filmmakers are inquisitive and curious; they prefer real facts to alternative ones. Ratner, of course, earned Hollywood over $2 billion with his blockbusters about gunfire and exploding cars. He's never made a documentary – and I agree with the first lady that he hasn't made one now.

Still, I enjoyed several scenes exactly as they were: Melania hurrying to get off the phone with Trump when he starts boasting about his electoral college numbers ("It was a big win," she assures him, smoothly), Melania nudging her husband to profess that his "proudest legacy will be that of a peacemaker and a unifier," Trump's pique that his big day must battle for ratings against the college football championships. "We've had this date for hundreds of years," Trump says with a huff. "They probably did it on purpose."

As a kicker, "Melania" observes its central couple politely nodding goodnight after they come home from three inauguration balls, making it clear that the couple prefers separate bedrooms. Their marriage remains an enigma. Ratner captures lots of hand-holding, little connection. Reacting to the one-year anniversary of Melania's mother's death, her husband tells the camera, "This one had a hard time with that." He sounds like he's talking about an assistant challenged to bring him an ice-cold Diet Coke.

I cannot recommend "Melania" as a good movie or even an interesting one. It has the feel of a soothingly looped AI screen saver, a trance-inducing spell where nothing matters so long as your high heels aren't hurting your feet. Yet against all odds, there is a truth in her SUV-to-tarmac-to-SUV-to-tarmac insularity. Future historians will be glad to have "Melania" as a lens into this moment in time. Like everything she touches, it's a costly artifact.

'Melania'

Rated: PG, for some thematic elements

Running time: 1 hour, 44 minutes

Playing: In theaters

MOVIE REVIEW

'A Private Life' sees Jodie Foster mesmerize in a French murder mystery

By MOIRA MACDONALD
The Seattle Times (TNS)

French filmmaker Rebecca Zlotowski's beguiling "A Private Life" signals early that it's no ordinary noir. The film begins with the malevolent twang of the Talking Heads' "Psycho Killer," played over a shot of a bare arm lying in the snow. Snowflakes, barely paler than the exposed skin, fall on it, softly piling on – and then, suddenly and playfully, the fingers twitch.

"A Private Life" is the story of a psychiatrist, and as such it delves into unexpected places in the mind – curiously beautiful dream sequences, like that arm. Dr. Lilian Steiner (Jodie Foster, in a performance almost entirely in French) is an American in Paris: divorced from her ex-husband Gaby (Daniel Auteuil), distant from her adult son Julien (Vincent Lacoste), keeping herself busy seeing patients and smoking. (This American is very French.) At the film's start, Lilian learns that one of her patients, Paula (Virginie Efira), has unexpectedly died, and Paula's doe-eyed daughter Valérie (Luàna Bajrami) tells Lilian the death was a suicide. But Lilian, in the manner of all noir heroines, begins to wonder whether Paula was murdered and launches an investigation – accompanied, unexpectedly and delightfully, by Gaby.

What happens next isn't as important as how it happens – how Zlotowski tells a dark story in warm autumn tones (the film's depiction of Paris in the fall is enchanting); how Foster adds another mesmerizing performance to her long gallery of smart, complicated on-screen women; how somehow, sneakily, Lilian and Gaby's relationship finds its way from a subplot to the heart of the film. Foster and Auteuil have a charming, playful chemistry; you wonder why these two ever split up, and late in the film, Lilian's wondering, too, asking him point-blank, "Why did you leave me?" (His answer, with a sigh: "Pass me the cigarette.")

"A Private Life" is a murder mystery only on its surface; at its heart, it's an exploration of a lonely woman's extremely active mind, and an unexpectedly moving story of becoming more present in one's real life, rather than one's imaginary one. Foster, her face radiating wary intelligence, invites us into Lilian's head, letting us see her listening, learning, changing just a bit. I don't imagine that Zlotowski is planning a multi-movie franchise in which Lilian and Gaby solve crimes, drink wine and share cigarettes. As they might say, quel dommage.

'A Private Life'

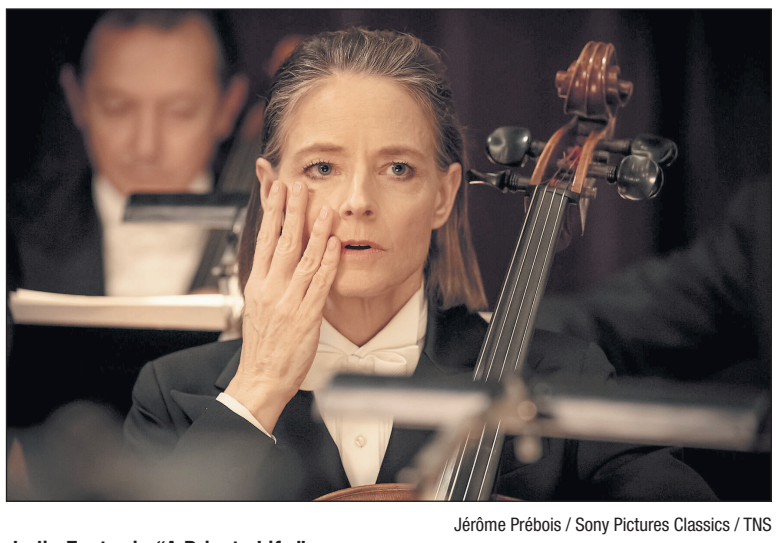
★★★ ½

(In French, with English subtitles)

MPA rating: R (for some sexual content, graphic nudity, language and brief violence)

Running time: 1:47

How to watch: Now in theaters



Jérôme Prébois / Sony Pictures Classics / TNS

Jodie Foster in "A Private Life."

Monica Schipper / Getty Images / TNS

Bad Bunny performs onstage during the 2025 iHeartRadio Music Awards at the Dolby Theatre on March 17, 2025, in Los Angeles.

Why Bad Bunny is the NFL's biggest Super Bowl halftime show swing yet

By SCOTT MERVIS
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (TNS)

Diversity has been the name of the game since Jay-Z's Roc Nation took over production of the Super Bowl halftime show for the 2020 edition.

Prior to that, the classic-rock run of Tom Petty, Bruce Springsteen and the Who had already ended in 2010 and viewers were into a stretch that included the likes of Coldplay, Lady Gaga, Justin Timberlake and Maroon 5.

Beginning in 2020, Jay-Z took the production firmly into the hip-hop/R&B realm – the most popular genre in the country, according to Nielsen – with Jennifer Lopez and Shakira, and then continuing with the Weeknd, a group of Dr. Dre-led rap and R&B legends, Rihanna and Usher.

Last year was a bold step with the incendiary Kendrick Lamar, who was not there to please the masses with sing-along hooks.

On Sunday, the NFL goes full global and full hot groove with one of the walk-ons from that 2020 halftime spectacle – Bad Bunny. The so-called "King of Latin Trap" takes the field with music built on booming low-end bass, skeletal beats and a voice that slides between rapping and melodic crooning.

"What I'm feeling goes beyond myself," the artist said in a statement. "It's for those who came before me and ran countless yards so I could come in and score a touchdown ... This is for my people, my culture, and our history. Ve y dile a tu abuela, que seremos el HALFTIME SHOW DEL SUPER BOWL."

Who is Bad Bunny?

If you go to Bad Bunny's Spotify page, the first thing you may notice is that four of his "Popular" tracks have crossed the billion-stream mark, speaking to his sheer cultural saturation. He has upwards of 82 million monthly listeners on that service alone and ranked as the most streamed artist in 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2025. He has won three Grammys, 17 Latin Grammys and 10 Billboard Music Awards.

He is also known beyond the music world as a celebrity performer in WWE and, on the big screen, an assassin in "Bullet Train" and a busboy-turned-caddie in "Happy Gilmore 2."

Before he was selling out stadiums, the 31-year-old Puerto Rican star born Benito Antonio Martínez Ocasio was a grocery bagger uploading songs to SoundCloud. His early tracks, going back to 2016, blended Latin trap with a DIY looseness – distorted vocals, lo-fi beats and lyrics like late-night voice notes.

The turning point came with "Soy Peor," a minimalist breakup anthem that caught fire in Puerto Rico and beyond for its emotional bluntness.

By 2018, he was collaborating with Cardi B ("I Like It") and Drake ("Mia"), introducing millions to a Spanish-language star who made no effort to translate himself.

His debut album, dropped on Christmas Eve 2018, revealed Bad Bunny as an artist unbound by genre and style. Per its Wikipedia page, it is "primarily a Latin trap and reggaeton album, which also incorporates elements of pop, rock, hip-hop, R&B, bachata, dembow, ballad, acoustic, electronic, house, reggae, dancehall, Andean, tropical, synth-pop, pop-punk, chillwave and synthwave."

In case you're counting, that's 20 things, so he's all over the place. And yet, he pulls it together under his voice. He can pivot from bruised-heart ballad to beach-party anthem to political lament without warning.

"YHLQMDLG," his second album, leaned more into bouncy reggaeton with punchy, percussive tracks built on dembow rhythms. The sun-soaked "Un Verano Sin Ti" ("A Summer Without You") (2022) spent 13 weeks at No. 1 and became Spotify's most-streamed album of all time, equally suited for beach parties and late-night drives

In January 2025, he went to No. 1 again with "Debí Tirar Más Fotos," a rhythmic reinvention of Puerto Rican folk grappling with questions of identity, displacement and cultural survival.

The look, the message

Alongside the music, Bad Bunny has challenged rigid ideas of masculinity in reggaeton by wearing skirts, painting his nails and speaking openly about gender norms.

He has been active in the political ring as well. In 2019, he halted his European tour to join massive street protests in Puerto Rico that led to Gov. Ricardo Rosselló's resignation amid corruption scandals and mishandling of Hurricane Maria recovery.

His 2022 track "El Apagón" (The Blackout) referenced chronic blackouts and gentrification and on the 2025 track "LO QUE LE PASÓ A HAWAii" ("What Happened to Hawaii"), he warned against Puerto Rico losing cultural identity through U.S. integration and tourism-driven changes.

During her 2024 presidential campaign, he endorsed Kamala Harris and responded to comedian Tony Hinchcliffe's quip about Puerto Rico being a "floating island of garbage" with an eight-minute Instagram video celebrating Puerto Rican resilience and culture.

More recently, he said he was avoiding U.S. concert dates because "ICE could be outside."

Bunny backlash

Of course, a lot of people would prefer Bad Religion or the long-gone Bad Brains and Bad Company.

Like just about everything else, the reaction to Bad Bunny as headliner has been highly polarized.

President Donald Trump weighed in saying, telling Newsmax, "I've never heard of him. I don't know who he is. ...I think it's absolutely ridiculous." Tossing in Green Day as pregame performers, Trump told The New York Post, "I'm anti-them. I think it's a terrible choice. All it does is sow hatred. Terrible."

A Change.org petition titled "Replace Bad Bunny with George Strait for the 2026 Super Bowl Halftime Show" garnered more than 120,000 signatures.

Turning Point USA just announced an "All-American Halftime Show," framed around "faith, family and freedom," with Kid Rock, Brantley Gilbert, Lee Brice and Gabby Barrett.

Kid Rock said in statement, "We're approaching this show like David and Goliath. Competing with the pro football machine and a global pop superstar is almost impossible, or is it? He said he's having a dance party – wearing a dress and singing in Spanish. Cool. We plan to play great songs for folks who love America."

NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell defended the choice, saying, "He's one of the leading and most popular entertainers in the world. That's what we try to achieve." He added, "I don't think we've ever selected an artist where we didn't have some blowback or criticism."

Jennifer Lopez joined Bad Bunny fans in celebrating the moment, telling "The Today Show" in October, "I'm so excited for him... He puts on a great show. He's an amazing entertainer."

Ken Casey, frontman for punk band Dropkick Murphys, added his two cents, telling Billboard that is Bad Bunny a "true American" and saying, "I had never really listened to Bad Bunny's music, but after his performance in 'Happy Gilmore 2,' I will go to the mat for that guy. God bless him."

Bad Bunny, in his "SNL" monologue, addressed the language barrier issue, saying, "If you didn't understand what I just said, you have four months to learn."

What he might play

Should you want to jump in with both feet and game-prep for Bad Bunny, here are some of the most likely songs on the setlist.

"BAILE INOLVIDABLE": The massive hit from his latest album, built around a salsa groove, is a poetic lament about a romance that may have run its course. "Life is a party that one day ends," he sings, "and you were my unforgettable dance."

"TITÍ ME PREGUNTÓ": Rolling Stone ranked this track from "Un Verano Sin Ti" the best song of 2022. The shapeshifting hit finds Bunny telling his auntie why he can't seem to settle down, flipping between humor and bravado.

"ME PORTO BONITO": This reggaeton club anthem featuring Puerto Rican singer Chencho Corleone is a flirtatious come-on on which Bad Bunny offers, "If you want me to, I'll make you a baby or bring you the plan B."

"I LIKE IT": Cardi B, superstar and girlfriend of New England Patriots wide receiver Stefon Diggs, would carry the ball here should she walk on for her festive hit deemed the "song of the summer" in 2018.

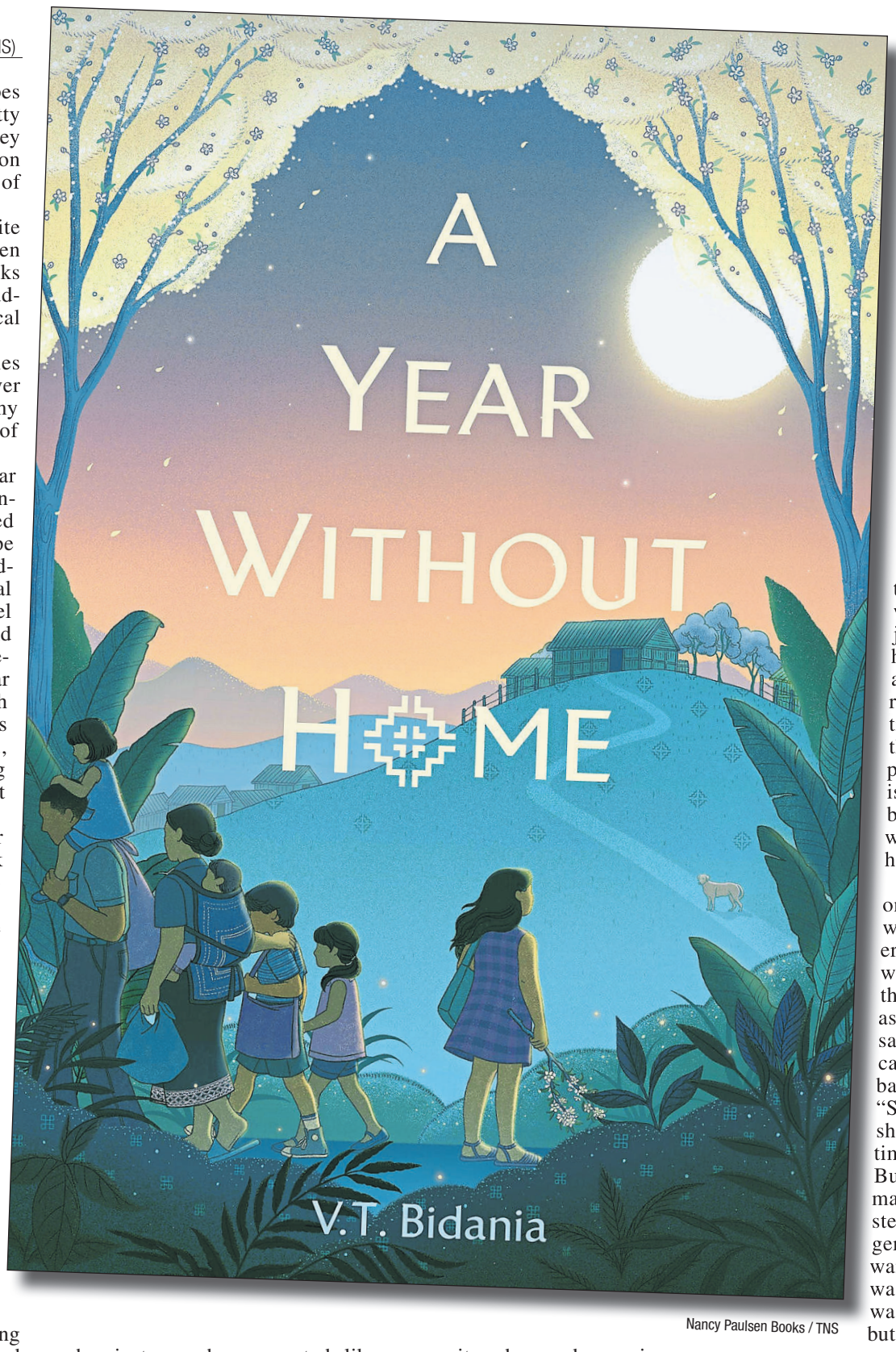
"DTMF" ("DEBÍ TIRAR MÁS FOTOS"): This song from the new album, translating to "I should have taken more photos," is a nostalgic look back at good times and good friends in San Juan, Puerto Rico, while also moving positively toward the future.

"Now Bernie has a baby, and Jan has a girl," he sings. "We're no longer about the flashy stuff and chains / We're here for the things that are truly worth it."

BOOKS

This novelist's family fled Laos and she ended up in Minnesota

By CHRIS HEWITT
The Minnesota Star Tribune (TNS)



Nancy Paulsen Books / TNS

V. T. Bidania describes her family as "pretty private" and "shy" but they better get used to attention because they're the stars of her new book.

"I didn't want to write about them," said the Arden Hills-based writer of books for young people, including the autobiographical "A Year Without Home."

"I like to read stories and memoirs but I never thought I'd write about my family. But it all kind of happened."

Bidania is calling "A Year Without Home" a fictionalized memoir. Inspired by her family's escape from Laos in the mid-1970s and eventual arrival in Minnesota, the novel changes some names and moves around many details. But it's very similar to her family's story, with big sister Gao Sheng as the main character (V.T., whose Lao name is Vong Deuane, was a toddler at the time).

And there's another twist: The entire book is written in free (unrhymed) verse.

"I was reading a whole bunch of middle-grade verse novels a few years back, when they started to become all the rage. I just fell in love with them," said Bidania, who mostly reads books written for youngsters. "A lot were immigrant stories but not all of them. Really, what got me was they were so beautifully written, not just the lyrical writing and imagery but what got to me was the white space."

Bidania, who is raising two sons with husband Win, was fascinated by the possibilities of the empty parts of pages that surround poems, space that can speed up or slow down the story or emphasize important parts. In a way, putting fewer words on a page is similar to how movie close-ups signal us to pay especially close attention.

That's why when Bidania really wants to make an impact in the new book, she pulls back on the words. For instance, a poem – or chapter, as Bidania refers to them – in which the main character's grandmother talks about how tough times make us stronger has just one phrase on the page: "Maybe she was right."

Hopefully, there's extra power in that technique because "A Year Without Home" uses it sparingly. Bidania would have liked to have used more white spacey pages, including in a section when her family learns her dad is on a list of Hmong people the Communists are hunting for, but she was overruled.

"On one page, I wanted to put just dad's name. We were so shocked that they were looking for him. But my editor said no. We had to cut a lot, actually, because the way it's formatted, like poems, it ends up being a lot more pages," said Bidania.

She likes paragraphs, too, but Bidania, whose other books include "Astrid and Apollo and the Sticky Noodle Situation," was struck by the power of just a few words on a page. Verse came surprisingly naturally to her, even though she had not written poetry or even studied it, partly because all those books-in-verse that she read amounted to a self-taught poetry course.

"The novels were so beautiful and powerful that I felt inspired: Maybe I'm going to try to write one, too," said Bidania, who has a degree in journalism from St. Catherine University in St. Paul and a master of fine arts in children's literature from Manhattan's New School. "Then, I thought, 'Why not write about my family's escape and our time in the refugee camps?' If I wanted something to affect readers the way these books affected me, that seemed like a good thing to write about."

Bidania interviewed family members, including sister Gao Sheng, who really did make rice cakes with their mom and sell them to other residents in the Thai refugee camp where they lived, and brother Yia, who was sent to the United States as a child, months before the rest of the family made the trip.

The hope is that there are many audiences for "A Year Without Home": verse-loving readers, second- or third-generation Hmong kids who don't know their families' stories, children with Hmong friends and anyone who loves a tale of triumphing against long odds.

"I wanted to show about our hardships and suffering and about the time in the camp, but I also wanted to show the joys and the love we had for our homes and for Laos. Sorry, I get really emotional talking about this," said Bidania, pausing briefly. "It is a refugee story but, more than that, I want the book to be a human story."

The jury's still out on how her family will react. Her brother said he was fine with whatever, since the book is labeled as fiction, but Bidania said it was tricky to capture the character based on her mother: "She's fine now that she's older but at the time, she was scary. But I didn't want to make her look like the stereotypical Asian tiger mom, either. I did want to show that she was strict and that it was hard for my sister but I didn't want her to seem evil or abusive."

She's not sure her mother will read the book, so she may never know what mom thinks. She definitely won't be able to learn her dad's reaction, although Bidania hopes he'd have been proud.

"Halfway through working on the book, my dad passed away. I really missed him. It tilted my world on its axis," Bidania said. "But, eventually, I thought, 'I'll get back into it, finish it and send it to my agent.' That really helped with the grieving process. If I had not had this book to focus on, I don't know what I would have done."

BESTSELLERS

Here are the bestsellers for the week that ended Saturday, Jan. 24, compiled from data from independent and chain bookstores, book wholesalers and independent distributors nationwide, powered by Circana BookScan.

Hardcover fiction

1. Twelve Months. Jim Butcher. Ace
2. Half His Age. Jennette McCurdy. Ballantine
3. The Correspondent. Virginia Evans. Crown
4. My Husband's Wife. Alice Feeney. Pine & Cedar
5. The Things We Leave Unfinished (signed). Rebecca Yarros. Amara
6. The Widow. John Grisham. Doubleday
7. The First Time I Saw Him. Laura Dave. Scribner
8. Alchemised. SenLinYu. Del Rey
9. The Secret of Secrets. Dan Brown. Doubleday
10. Anatomy of an Alibi. Ashley Elston. Viking/Dorman

Hardcover nonfiction

1. The Invisible Coup. Peter Schweizer. Harper
2. Stop, in the Name of God. Charlie Kirk. Winning Team
3. Of Course It's Good! Jessica Secrest. Page Street
4. The Official We Do Not Care Club Handbook. Melani Sanders. Harvest
5. Your Roots Don't Define You. Chris Appleton. Hanover Square
6. The Next Renaissance. Zack Kass. Wiley
7. Enough. Jastreboff/Winfrey. Avid Reader
8. The Healing Power of Resilience. Tara Narula. Simon Element
9. 1929. Andrew Ross Sorkin. Viking
10. Football. Chuck Klosterman. Penguin Press

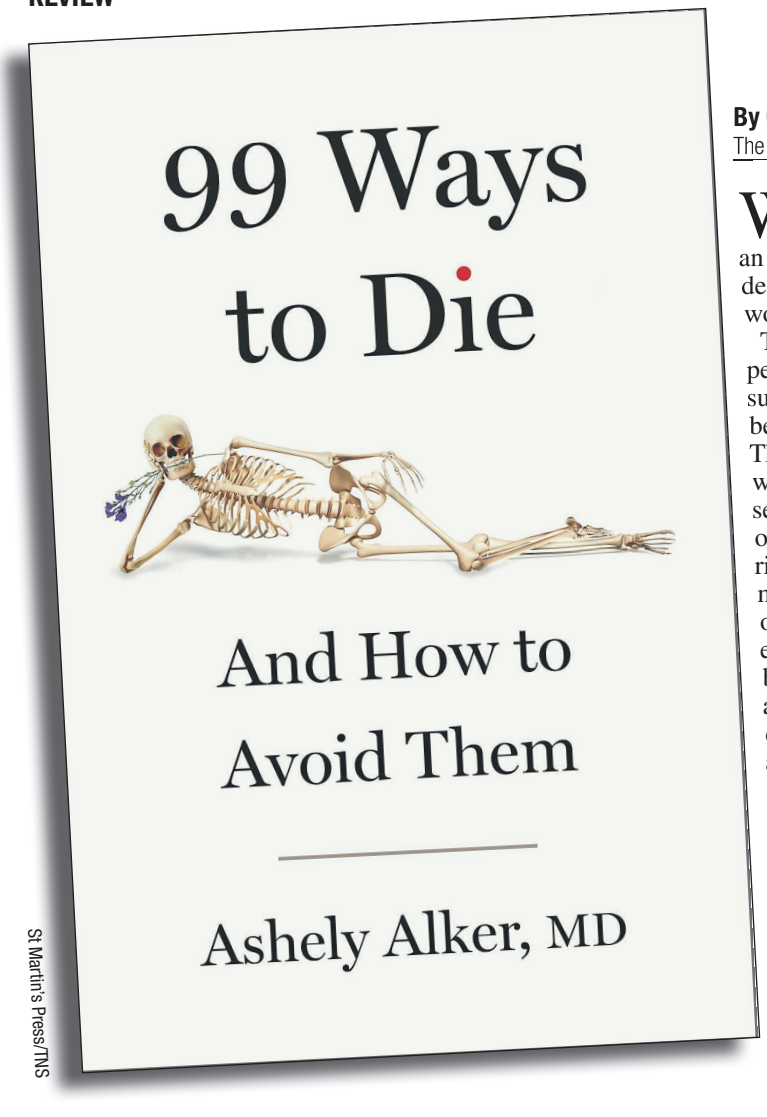
Trade paperback

1. Woman Down. Colleen Hoover. Montlake
2. Theo of Golden. Allen Levi. Atria
3. Dungeon Crawler Carl. Matt Dinniman. Ace
4. The Housemaid. Freida McFadden. Grand Central
5. The God of the Woods. Liz Moore. Riverhead
6. Catch Her If You Can. Tessa Bailey. Avon
7. The Surrogate Mother. Freida McFadden. Poisoned Pen
8. People We Meet on Vacation (media tie-in). Emily Henry. Berkley
9. Remarkably Bright Creatures. Shelby Van Pelt. Ecco
10. The Tenant. Freida McFadden. Poisoned Pen

Reprinted from Publishers Weekly.

REVIEW

'Hilarious' book tells us how to avoid dying



St Martin's Press/TNS

By CHRIS HEWITT
The Minnesota Star Tribune (TNS)

Writing about "99 Ways to Die: and How to Avoid Them" is an easy job, and not just because the descriptive title does so much of the work.

To give you an idea of what to expect from Ashely Alker's hilarious, surprisingly useful book, the best bet is just to quote from it liberally. The emergency room physician writes with attitude, common sense and deep knowledge about ordinary and extraordinary health risks (spoiler alert: there are way more than 99 of them). Most of us, for instance, will never encounter the spitting thick-tailed black scorpion of Africa but just about everyone would like some commonsense tips on how to avoid catching a cold (some are obvious: wash your hands often).

That particular scorpion is a good place to start quoting Alker, to give a sense of how much fun she is to read. Of those scorpions, which dislike cinnamon, she has this to say: "They clearly want to be left alone. These arthropods are not hunting you; think of it like a run-in with your high-school ex in a grocery store – neither of you wants to be there. No touching, back away slowly and go immediately to the spice aisle to create a cinnamon circle."

"99 Ways to Die" probably isn't for you if you're one of those people who imagines you have the symptoms of whatever disease you're reading about because, trust me, you don't want to think you have the symptoms brought about by eating tainted barracuda (they include the sensation that your teeth are falling out).

If you're a vaccine denier, you'll grow impatient with the book, in which I counted more than 200 uses of the word "vaccine" before deciding that was no longer a fun game and I was done with it. Vaccines are the key to the "how to avoid them" part of Alker's title in many cases, as well as the source of breezy anecdotes like one about a teenager who was perving on some milkmaids in the 18th century when he inadvertently discovered the smallpox vaccine.

Throughout the book, Alker comes off as the sort of witty, no-nonsense doc you'd hope to encounter in the ER, one just as likely to dazzle a heart patient with a reference to Taylor Swift as to an outdated '80s action hero: "I did what any decent emergency medicine doctor would do in my situation, I MacGyvered my way out of it, creating a solution with two rubber bands, chewing gum, a defibrillator and a nearby hospital. The rubber bands were for my hair and I was chewing the gum. Sascha did well and we now stock the necessary medication at my free-standing emergency department."

Here she is on how kangaroos can kill you when you visit lovely Australia: "Roos seem to really focus on leg day, but their tiny T. rex arms are also shockingly strong and equipped with claws. The male stands at an impressive six feet ten inches long, yoked to the max with rippling muscles. When they fight they look like tiny-armed teenagers in a slap fight, until they kick and bust the opposition's spleen."

On that same trip, you'll want to avoid the colorful, deadly sea slugs known as nudibranch because "these kids are the wilderness equivalent of RuPaul's pride parade float, there to be seen, but the background music is blaring, loud and clear, 'Can't Touch This.'"

The book is such a delight that you likely won't stop to consider that Alker has given you dozens of new worries. Or that that's the kind of stress that could kill a person.

AUTOMOTIVE

AUTO REVIEWS

2026 Honda Prelude is a reminder of what once was

By LARRY PRINTZ
Tribune News Service (TNS)

Photos by Honda / TNS

For 2026, the Honda Prelude returns for the first time in nearly 25 years, exhumed from the late 20th century, when coupes were coupes, buttons clicked, and the most advanced software in your car was the radio, which mercifully never needed an update.

Naturally, I approached the new 2026 Honda Prelude with suspicion. Because nostalgia is a warm, comforting lie, like believing music was better in your youth or that politicians ever knew what they were doing. Car companies resurrect old names all the time, usually slapping them onto something dull and apologetic, then expecting applause. But this? This is different.

This is not Honda's sports car of old. The automaker considers the 2026 Prelude a grand tourer. And it is, as long as you don't expect luxury. What you should expect is a compact coupe for people who like their transportation to have a point of view. Honda once owned this territory the way the Italians own red sauce. Then they wandered off into a forest of crossovers and infotainment systems. The new 2026 Prelude finds Honda wandering back out, brushing off the pine needles and getting back to business.

In the finest Honda tradition, the 2026 Prelude looks right. It's sleek without looking angry, sporty without screaming for attention, and refreshingly free of aerodynamic tchotchkes stapled on for the benefit of drivers who imagine they're more skilled than Lando or Max. Its design exudes the quiet confidence of a car that knows it doesn't need fake vents and fanboy styling to get your attention. Park it next to the Civic Type R and the Prelude looks like it's been to finishing school.

Inside, the surprise isn't some designer's fever dream. It's competence. Everything works, and is where you expect it to be, which in the modern automotive world qualifies as a minor miracle. The seats seem to have been designed by someone who has actually driven a car for more than the length of a pop song, which already puts Honda well ahead of its competition.

That said, perfection is not on the menu. Taller drivers will slide the seat back to accommodate their giraffe-like legs, only to discover the steering wheel stubbornly refuses to come along for some of the ride. Meanwhile, your right leg will make the acquaintance of the hard plastic center console, an introduction neither of you asked for. But this is the inevitable tax you pay for the Prelude's tidy 178-inch footprint; compactness always collects its pound of flesh somewhere. As for the rear seats, they're best regarded as an optimistic suggestion and folded flat to enlarge the hatchback's 15 cubic feet of cargo space, which is just enough room for your luggage and any illusions you had about carrying adults back there.

Thankfully, you don't need a master's degree in user interface design to change the temperature. This alone qualifies as a radical act in 2026. And there's a high-definition 9-inch color touchscreen with wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto as well as Google Assistant, Google Maps, Google Play, a Bose audio system, a 10.2-inch digital instrument cluster and USB-C ports.

Mechanically speaking, this wave of misty-eyed nostalgia is assembled from the best bits lying around the Civic aisle of the warehouse. Underneath, it's a shortened Civic chassis, powered by a Civic Hybrid drivetrain, and suspended by Civic Type R bits. To be fair, Honda has fiddled with all of it, resulting in a Prelude that is spry, polite, and impeccably behaved.

Honda's fourth-generation, hybrid system cranks out 200 horsepower and 236 pound-feet of torque, which sounds impressive until you realize it's delivered with all the drama of a municipal bus schedule. There's no transmission, none at all. Instead, the powertrain drives the axles directly, a solution that's very efficient There is a rather gimmicky S+ button and paddle shifters that simulates shifting with an eight-speed transmission that it lacks. This sort of deceitfulness is unusual to find in a Honda, especially because its overall performance impact is minimal at best. Even worse is an adjustable regenerative braking system that's so cumbersome to use, only an engineer could love it.

The chassis is balanced. The suspension manages the remarkable trick of being well-controlled without feeling punitive, unlike, say, the federal government. The Prelude delivers steering that talks in complete sentences and feels like it was tuned by people who understand that enthusiasm is not measured in skid pad numbers. Then there's its underlying smoothness. Call it electrification, call it modernity. It makes the car feel refined without turning it anesthetized. The powertrain does its work quietly and efficiently, but when you lean on it, the Prelude delivers. That is the important part. It's fun. But you won't find it charging Nürburgring laps like a caffeinated lunatic.

Just as with Preludes of the past, the newest one will not frighten Corvettes. It will not rearrange your internal organs. What it will do is make a familiar road feel worth revisiting. It invites the lost art of carrying speed because the car encourages it, not because the spec sheet demands it.

The real triumph here is philosophical. Honda remembered what the Prelude name meant: a promise of what's to come. A warm-up act for what's coming next from Honda. The 2026 Honda Prelude is not a rebellion. It is something more unique. It's nostalgia that serves as a reminder.

Larry Printz is an automotive journalist based in South Florida.

2026 Honda Prelude

Base price: $42,000

Powertrain: 2.0-liter, two-motor hybrid

Horsepower/Torque: 200/232 pound-feet

EPA rating (combined city/highway): 44 mpg

Fuel required: Regular

Length/Width/Height: 178/53/74 inches

Ground clearance: 5.3 inches

Cargo capacity: 15 cubic feet

Towing capacity: Not rated

Get the Griswolds a Honda Pilot road-warrior

By HENRY PAYNE
The Detroit News (TNS)

Henry Payne / The Detroit News / TNS

Honda makes sensational hot hatches for gearheads with the ferocious, corner-carving Civic Type R at the front of the parade

The Honda Pilot is not that car.

The three-row SUV is Honda's band leader for a different hatchback parade: ergonomically brilliant hatchback for families. If the driver-centric Civic Type R is built for adrenaline-pumping short sprints, Pilot is made for the long haul – a rolling living room for 4-7 passengers.

Imagine a Griswold family road trip from Detroit to San Diego, where I tested the Pilot this January. Pilot is no Wagon Queen Family Truckster. The fourth-generation Pilot has been updated for the 2026 model year after its successful launch in 2023. Pilot 4.0 brought more rugged styling and a Trailsport model to slake Americans' thirst for the outdoors.

The '26 model advances that vibe with a bigger front grille, tough-looking front and rear scuff plates, mod wheel designs and an expanded color palette. Still, Pilot won't turn heads like some of its competitors – think the handsome Mazda CX-90, Ford Explorer, GMC Acadia, Hyundai Santa Fe, Dodge Durango, Jeep Grand Cherokee L. Yum.

Parked on the beach north of San Diego in the town of Oceanside, my test Pilot went unnoticed. Open the door, however, and the big Honda comes to life.

If the Civic Type R hellion is an ergonomic marvel for the enthusiast driver with its notchy manual shifter, laser steering and supportive seats, then Pilot is a study in creature comforts. Cruising along Oceanside's busy beach streets, I never looked down at the steering wheel to adjust features.

I thumbed a toggle switch on the right-wheel spoke to adjust speed in adaptive cruise control, while a roller underneath adjusted my right-side information in the digital instrument display (mpg, tire pressure, etc.). On the left spoke, a parallel set of switches controlled radio volume/left display info. Before pulling out of my parking space, I checked the mirror for vehicles in my blind spot.

Not only are these controls handy, they're standard on the entry-level SPORT model along with a suite of Honda Sensing goodies, including lane-assist and automatic braking. Speaking of SPORT, the standard model is hardly a wallflower.

Like the Civic Sport model, Pilot Sport looks cool with black wheels and trim for $45,790 (all-wheel drive added). The strangest standard feature? Paddle shifters. Taking that SPORT vibe too far, they are as useful on a three-row SUV as a bicycle for a fish.

All this tech doesn't come cheap, and Pilot Sport costs two grand north of the 2025 model. Let's talk the cost of reliability and resale value while we're at it. JD Power rates Pilot as average (80 of 100) in reliability and top tier in resale value (88).

After a long day at the San Diego Zoo Safari Park in the San Pasqual Valley, the Griswold kids may need some, ahem, space in the second-row seat.

Honda has cleverly designed the second-row bench with a removable center section. Want to separate your rugrats into captain's chairs? Uproot the center seat section with two easy pull-tabs, then stow it in the back. The back?

That's right, Pilot has carved out space under the rear cargo floor (above the spare tire) that stores the seat like a puzzle piece. The cavity is also useful storage for dirty cleats, towels, your mother-in-law (kidding about that last part).

The Pilot's second row has long ago been a segment leader with its single-button third-row access. One push on the top of the seat and it collapses forward. I folded in my 6'5" frame (same size as Chevy Chase, aka Clark Griswold) back there with headroom and legroom to spare – and brought along my phone (USB-C charge port) and Dudley's Famous Bakery and Café apple turnover (a favorite stop in the Cuyamaca Mountains north of San Diego) with me.

Opt for the $52K Touring package and a panoramic roof comes standard to flood the third row with more light.

Family SUVs inevitably become second homes with parents/kids storing everything from tissues to USB cable to books to games to Chips Ahoy cookie sleeves (OK, maybe that's just me) around the cabin. The Honda Pilot gets it.

The cabin is littered with storage.

Dashboard cubby the size of a bear cave. Console cubby. Wireless phone charger console cubby. The aforementioned third-row seat twin cubbies. And a personal favorite: door cupholders positioned in front of the door handles so you can out any size drink, including tall Thermoses.

Those Thermoses might come in handy in the $52K Trailsport, which is armed to the teeth for where the asphalt ends: skid plates, one-inch lift, all-terrain tires. This beauty complements the two-row Honda Passport Trailsport (which has been selling like hotcakes), and is the second most popular Pilot after the EX-L. Allow me to recommend those fat all-terrains for Detroit potholes the size of Vermont when the snow melts this spring. You're welcome.

The rugged vibe is reinforced by a throaty, 262 pound-feet-of torque V-6 engine. ROOOOAR! responded the 3.5-liter mill as I flogged it across the Cuyamacas. In the face of restrictive government emissions standards in recent years, some members of the three-row class (Chevy Traverse, for example) have opted for turbo-4 engines, which have put off some customers who expect six cylinders when writing checks for 50 grand. Pilot's 10-speed transmission is operated by a space-saving, so-called "tiger shifter," which takes a little getting used to.

Happily, Honda's V-6 delivers the same 21 mpg as the turbo-4 Traverse while sounding more authoritative. And Pilot's 463-mile range is significantly more than its electric peer – the 283-mile Prologue, which starts $5K north of Pilot and is a road trip pain in the tailgate when it comes to family trips to, say, California.

Like the exterior, the Pilot's interior has lagged competitors (check out the lovely dashboard-spanning screens in the Hyundai Palisade, Kia Telluride, Chevy Traverse), and Pilot's dash screen has grown to 12.3 inches (a 37 percent increase) in response. But it still trails Detroiters Traverse and Explorer in hands-free driving assist for long trips.

The Honda does offer the Google Built-in operating system standard, which brings 5G WiFi for devices as well as standard Google Navigation.

"Hey, Google" I barked as I left Dudley's Bakery. "Navigate to San Diego Padres ballpark." Done.

The Pilot is the complete package for road trips, grocery shopping, basketball team transport. And if Clark Griswold needs something to get Christie Brinkley's attention, a Civic Type R will fit next to it in the garage.

Henry Payne is auto critic for The Detroit News.

2026 Honda Pilot

★★★★

Vehicle type: Front-engine, front- and all-wheel-drive seven-to-eight-passenger SUV

Price: $43,690, including $1,495 destination fee ($54,990 Elite model as tested)

Powerplant: 3.5-liter V-6

Power: 285 horsepower, 262 pound-feet torque

Transmission: 10-speed automatic

Performance: 0-60 mph, 7.2 seconds (Car and Driver est.); towing, 5,000 pounds

Weight: 4,660 pounds (as tested)

Fuel economy: EPA est. mpg 19 city/27 highway/22 combined (FWD); 19 city/25 highway/21 combined (AWD); gas range, 463 miles

Report card

Highs: Livable ergonomics; capable Trailsport off-road model

Lows: No hands-free driving option; what's with the paddle shifters?

TECHNOLOGY

GADGETS

Tech accessories to improve your life

By GREGG ELLMAN
Tribune News Service (TNS)

Satechi, a company focused on creating tech accessories that work great, look great and improve people's lives, has a few new products out meeting those goals.

The **7-in-1 USB-C Multiport Adapter** ($59.99), part of the Satechi OntheGo Collection for mobile connectivity, offers seven of the most popular ports for connecting just about anything from anywhere. The device makes what used to be a complex process to set up a workstation quick and simple.

The hockey puck-shaped hub (2.6 inches round by 1 inch high/2.40 ounces) includes a built-in USB-C host cable for connecting and powering the hub. Around the outside are ports, including two USB-A ports with transfer speeds up to 5GB per second and one USB-C port with 100-watt input and up to 80-watt output power delivery. It also includes an SD memory card reader, a microSD card reader (up to 2TB), one HDMI 2.0 port and a single Gigabit Ethernet port to support 10/100/1000 Mbps.

For stability, the adapter hub has a magnetic mount and includes a 3M Adhesive Ring to attach and secure the adapter to your device. The 7-in-1 OntheGo USB-C Multiport Adapter is Mac- and Windows-compatible; a full list of supported devices is available on the Satechi website.

The 7-in-1 USB-C Multiport Adapter ($59.99), part of the Satechi OntheGo Collection for mobile connectivity, offers seven of the most popular ports for connecting just about anything from anywhere. The hockey puck-shaped hub includes a built-in USB-C host cable for connecting and powering the hub. Around the outside are two USB-A ports, one USB-C port, an SD memory card reader, a microSD card reader, one HDMI 2.0 port, and a Gigabit Ethernet port.
Satechi / TNS

Satechi also recently announced several new Thunderbolt 5 devices, including the **Thunderbolt 5 Pro Cable**. It is designed for professionals whose workflow demands faster speeds and performance, all in one cable.

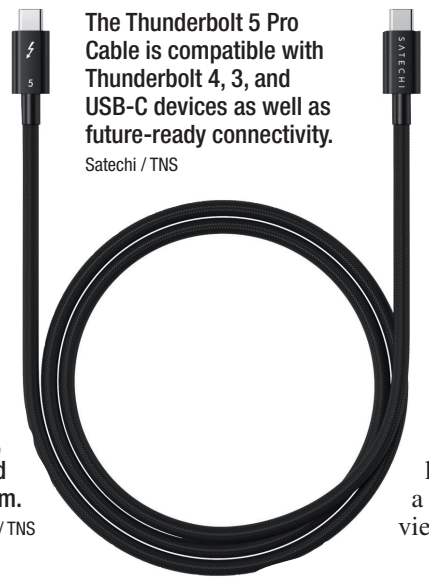
The Thunderbolt 5 Pro Cable ($39.99) has been tested for speeds up to 120 Gb/s uni-directional or 80 Gb/s bi-directional, and up to 240 watts of power delivery, according to Satechi. It is compatible with Thunderbolt 4, 3 and USB-C devices as well as future-ready connectivity.

https://satechi.net/

Status Audio's new **Pro X true wireless earbuds** feature impressive sound, powered by a Knowles-Powered hybrid triple-driver acoustic system.

Inside each earbud is a 12 mm dynamic driver with two Knowles balanced armature drivers. What translates to users is accurate, as Status Audio describes it: deep, controlled bass, crystal-clear mids and detailed highs that bring music to life across genres.

Status Audio's new Pro X true wireless earbuds feature impressive sound, powered by a Knowles-Powered hybrid triple-driver acoustic system.
Status Audio / TNS



The Thunderbolt 5 Pro Cable is compatible with Thunderbolt 4, 3, and USB-C devices as well as future-ready connectivity.
Satechi / TNS

My New Year's Day testing had me use the ergonomically designed earbuds for a college football bowl game, hours of listening to a year-in-review playlist, and, of course, light music while napping. The non-scientific test told me they are good for music junkies and casual listeners alike. The sound can be customized with the Status Hub companion app (iOS and Android).

The Active Noise-Cancelling earbuds performed well indoors and outdoors, reducing ambient noise by up to 52 dB. If you don't want all external sounds removed, the Ambient Aware mode keeps enough sound to let you stay aware of your surroundings. Phone calls are crystal clear on both ends with AI-Powered Voiceloom Speech Enhancement and six Beam-Forming microphones.

The Pro X true wireless earbuds have a sharp-looking design with a black alloy finish and a small footprint, designed to sit flush against the ear and jawline. And I can confirm that the comfort was such that it lasted for hours of use. Silicone ear tips in S, M and L are included.

They have an IP55 water and dust-resistant rating, which will protect them from light rain. With Bluetooth 5.3, they have multipoint connectivity, Android Fast Pair and Microsoft Swift Pair. A full charge supports up to 8 hours of playback, and the Qi wireless charging case gives you another 24 hours.

https://www.status.co/products/pro-x, $249

Contact Gregg Ellman at greggellman@mac.com. Follow him on Twitter @greggellman.

Feeling unprepared for the AI boom? *You're not alone*

By PATRICK BARRY
University of Michigan
(The Conversation)

Journalist Ira Glass, who hosts the NPR show "This American Life," is not a computer scientist. He doesn't work at Google, Apple or Nvidia. But he does have a great ear for useful phrases, and in 2024 he organized an entire episode around one that might resonate with anyone who feels blindsided by the pace of AI development: "Unprepared for what has already happened."

Coined by science journalist Alex Steffen, the phrase captures the unsettling feeling that "the experience and expertise you've built up" may now be obsolete – or, at least, a lot less valuable than it once was.

Whenever I lead workshops in law firms, government agencies or nonprofit organizations, I hear that same concern. Highly educated, accomplished professionals worry whether there will be a place for them in an economy where generative AI can quickly – and relativity cheaply – complete a growing list of tasks that an extremely large number of people currently get paid to do.

Seeing a future that doesn't include you

In technology reporter Cade Metz's 2022 book, "Genius Makers: The Mavericks Who Brought AI to Google, Facebook, and the World," he describes the panic that washed over a veteran researcher at Microsoft named Chris Brockett when Brockett first encountered an artificial intelligence program that could essentially perform everything he'd spent decades learning how to master.

Overcome by the thought that a piece of software had now made his entire skill set and knowledge base irrelevant, Brockett was actually rushed to the hospital because he thought he was having a heart attack.

"My 52-year-old body had one of those moments when I saw a future where I wasn't involved," he later told Metz.

In his 2018 book, "Life 3.0: Being Human in the Age of Artificial Intelligence," MIT physicist Max Tegmark expresses a similar anxiety.

"As technology keeps improving, will the rise of AI eventually eclipse those abilities that provide my current sense of self-worth and value on the job market?"

The answer to that question, unnervingly, can often feel outside of our individual control.

"We're seeing more AI-related products and advancements in a single day than we saw in a single year a decade ago," a Silicon Valley product manager told a reporter for Vanity Fair back in 2023. Things have only accelerated since then.

Even Dario Amodei – the co-founder and CEO of Anthropic, the company that created the popular chatbot Claude – has been shaken by the increasing power of AI tools. "I think of all the times when I wrote code," he said in an interview on the tech podcast "Hard Fork." "It's like a part of my identity that I'm good at this. And then I'm like, oh, my god, there's going to be these (AI) systems that [can perform a lot better than I can]."

The irony that these fears live inside the brain of someone who leads one of the most important AI companies in the world is not lost on Amodei.

"Even as the one who's building these systems," he added, "even as one of the ones who benefits most from (them), there's still something a bit threatening about (them)."

Autor and agency

Yet as the labor economist David Autor has argued, we all have more agency over the future than we might think.

In 2024, Autor was interviewed by Bloomberg News soon after publishing a research paper titled Applying AI to Rebuild Middle-Class Jobs. The paper explores the idea that AI, if managed well, might be able to help a larger set of people perform the kind of higher-value – and higher-paying – "decision-making tasks currently arrogated to elite experts like doctors, lawyers, coders and educators."

This shift, Autor suggests, "would improve the quality of jobs for workers without college degrees, moderate earnings inequality, and – akin to what the Industrial Revolution did for consumer goods – lower the cost of key services such as healthcare, education and legal expertise."

It's an interesting, hopeful argument, and Autor, who has spent decades studying the effects of automation and computerization on the workforce, has the intellectual heft to explain it without coming across as Pollyannish.

But what I found most heartening about the interview was Autor's response to a question about a type of "AI doomerism" that believes that widespread economic displacement is inevitable and there's nothing we can do to stop it.

"The future should not be treated as a forecasting or prediction exercise," he said. "It should be treated as a design problem – because the future is not (something) where we just wait and see what happens. … We have enormous control over the future in which we live, and [the quality of that future] depends on the investments and structures that we create today."

At the starting line

I try to emphasize Autor's point about the future being more of a "design problem" than a "prediction exercise" in all the AI courses and workshops I teach to law students and lawyers, many of whom fret over their own job prospects.

The nice thing about the current AI moment, I tell them, is that there is still time for deliberate action. Although the first scientific paper on neural networks was published all the way back in 1943, we're still very much in the early stages of so-called "generative AI."

No student or employee is hopelessly behind. Nor is anyone commandingly ahead.

Instead, each of us is in an enviable spot: right at the starting line.

Patrick Barry is a clinical assistant professor of law and director of Digital Academic Initiatives at the University of Michigan. The Conversation is an independent and nonprofit source of news, analysis and commentary from academic experts. This article is republished under a Creative Commons license. Read the original article at https://theconversation.com.

Slow down the Wi-Fi to connect your smart home devices

By JIM ROSSMAN
Tribune News Service (TNS)

Recently I got an email from a reader, "Quite a while ago, based on a review in your column, I purchased 3 Kasa plugs (for inside lights) and a Kasa switch (for front outside lights). I loved them. However, a few months ago my Wi-Fi router (from Spectrum) became balky so Spectrum gave me a new updated one. This was labeled as WiFi-7. Alas, my Kasa devices would no longer connect to my Wifi! I called Kasa for help with this problem but they were unable to solve it. I am presently using plug-in mechanical timers for my indoor lights. I really miss being able to manage my lights via my iPhone!"

This problem is actually pretty common. Many smart home devices are designed to only work with 2.4Ghz Wi-Fi, which might not mean much to you if you're not a techie, but let me explain.

Wi-Fi devices use radios to communicate, and as Wi-Fi gets faster, it uses higher radio frequencies like 5Ghz and 6Ghz, which don't have as much range as good-old 2.4Ghz.

Most Wi-Fi routers combine their radio network names so that it is easier to connect, and devices can choose what frequency they want to use.

This is OK for a lot of devices like computers, but some older smart home devices have a problem connecting to some of the faster routers.

The fix is to temporarily turn off the other radios, leaving only the 2.4Ghz radio running so you can set up your legacy devices.

To do this, you'll have to access the settings of your Wi-Fi router and look for the specific spot to turn the radios on and off. You access your router's settings by using a connected computer, tablet or phone.

You'll need to do a search for your specific router model to see how to get in to the settings using a browser. There is also a chance your router uses an app. My Eero mesh Wi-Fi system has its own app that lets me access the settings.

In the Eero app, I go to the "Troubleshooting" section to an option called "My device won't connect." Click that and you'll see "My device is 2.4Ghz only."

The page explains that Eero networks are dual-band, running both 2.4Ghz and 5Ghz networks to improve speed and connectivity and reduce congestion on your network.

However, some devices require 2.4Ghz only for setup. There's a button to temporarily pause the 5Ghz radio for about 10 minutes so you can set up your equipment.

Your router has a similar setting, or a setting to manually turn off the 5ghz radio or at the least, a setting to set different network names for the 2.4Ghz and 5Ghz networks. These options will accomplish the same goal – letting you set up your devices.

The reader with the problem did let me know he was able to follow the directions and he did get his switches and plugs connected.

Jim Rossman is a tech columnist for Tribune News Service. He may be reached at jrossman techadviser@gmail.com.

Back
Troubleshooting
My device won't connect to my network
If you are experiencing trouble when trying to connect a personal device, we may need to limit the wireless bands used by your network.
By default, eero networks are dual-band, running both 5 GHz and 2.4 GHz. Having both bands improves speed and connectivity and reduces congestion on your network.
However, some devices require 2.4 GHz only for setup. So, let's temporarily restrict your network and connect those devices.
Temporarily pause 5 GHz
Home
Devices
Activity
Settings

Jim Rossman / TNS
The Eero Wi-Fi set up app.

There's a button to temporarily pause the 5Ghz radio for about 10 minutes so you can set up your equipment. Your router has a similar setting, or a setting to manually turn off the 5ghz radio or at the least, a setting to set different network names for the 2.4Ghz and 5Ghz networks. These options will accomplish the same goal – letting you set up your devices.

HOME & GARDEN

Nowadays, wallpaper is back and better than ever.

Krivosheina Elena / Dreamstime / TNS

WALLPAPER ISN'T YOUR ENEMY ANYMORE

By KAITLYN KEEGAN
Hartford Courant (TNS)

Over the years, wallpaper has been all the rage. Step into a house renovated from the 1950s to early 1990s, there is probably a lot of wallpaper. Current generations remember the sticky, smelly glue that soaked into your sheetrock and ruined anything it touched. As we turned into the mid to late 1990s, wallpaper began to fall out of favor.

Homeowners began ripping it down, dealing with the price tag-like paper that left glue everywhere. They steamed, they scraped, they wet the walls with wallpaper stripper. Anything that would help peel the stubborn paper and glue off.

Nowadays, wallpaper is back and better than ever.

The new wallpaper does not apply the same way as it used to. There are two methods in which wallpaper can be applied. Either paste the wall or peel and stick. It used to be that the installer had to soak the paper to activate the adhesive.

Peel and stick is the most commonly used; it is like using a sticker. Paste the walls is used for more heavy, high-quality wallpapers with a non-woven backing. You apply the glue to the wall and then hang the dry paper. You can then adjust the paper and smooth it out as needed before it dries.

The best part? Peel and stick wallpaper can often be reused. Wallpaper that has a non-woven backing can be peel off dry and leave behind some spots of glue that can be washed off with soapy water. The important thing about modern wallpaper is proper preparation of the walls prior to application. Make sure paint is dry and the walls are clean before you apply it.

Beside the changes in application, wallpaper is now accepted and encouraged in the interior design world.

"Wallpaper is a great way to add drama to a space," Kellie Burke of Kellie Burke Interiors said. "It adds that artistic flare that a piece of art would bring to a space."

Whether an accent wall or a whole room, wallpaper is a way to add individuality into a space. Individuality and bold colors are both trending.

"We are also loving the reinvented granny florals that were such a trend in the '80s," Burke said. "Layering of the same pattern on drapery, upholstery and walls is magic and warms up a space."

When looking at your space and considering what to do, or while questioning a choice, Burke said to go for it.

"Dare to be bold," she said.

How can I enhance my home with hardscaping?

Your lawn and garden may get the attention, but the real framework of your outdoor space is built from hard, durable features that shape how you live outside. That framework is called hardscaping, and it's one of the most effective ways to improve both the function and value of your home. Walkways, patios, decks, walls and firepits don't just look good; they guide movement, manage water, reduce maintenance and turn a yard into usable living space.

Angie Hicks
Ask Angi

Dreamstime / TNS

Level up your outdoor space by taking on some hardscaping projects.

Winter is an ideal time to plan these projects so you're ready to build when warmer weather returns. You can get on contractors' schedules and start planning now.

Hardscaping refers to the nonliving elements of a landscape, usually involving stone, concrete, wood and metal. Decks, patios, driveways, fences, retaining walls, ponds, pergolas and firepits all fall into this category.

These features give structure to your yard and help control how people, water and sight lines move through it. They also solve everyday problems. Hard surfaces need less upkeep than turf, hold up better during droughts and stay attractive year-round. Just as important, they expand your living space by creating outdoor rooms for cooking, entertaining, relaxing or simply passing through without trampling the lawn.

Most hardscape projects fall into a few familiar categories. Walkways and paths are among the simplest additions, but they make an outsized impact by guiding foot traffic and protecting grass and garden beds. Driveways function the same way on a larger scale. Decks and patios extend living areas outdoors. Pergolas and gazebos provide shade and create defined outdoor "rooms." Retaining walls reshape sloped yards and control erosion.

Costs vary widely. Small projects like prefabricated firepits or fountains may only run a few hundred dollars. Larger installations, such as patios, retaining walls, porches or outdoor kitchens, can climb into the tens of thousands. High-end projects can go much higher. Labor, permits, demolition, grading, drainage work and local building costs all affect the final number.

Successful hardscaping begins with planning. Work with the natural shape of your yard instead of fighting it. Think about how people will move through the space and avoid blocking access points or future pathways. Identify focal points, such as a tree, firepit or seating area, and build outward from there. Drainage deserves special attention. Hard surfaces shed water quickly, and poor planning can lead to pooling, erosion or foundation issues. Slopes, drains and rock channels help direct water safely away from the house. Blending plantings around solid features softens edges and keeps the space from feeling harsh or unfinished.

Some projects are manageable DIY jobs. Simple gravel paths or edging can be tackled with basic tools and patience. Anything involving structural loads, excavation, utilities or permits is best left to professionals. Mistakes in these areas can be expensive and unsafe.

When hiring, start with a clear plan. Measure dimensions, choose materials and decide on finishes before requesting quotes. Ask whether excavation, grading, sealing and cleanup are included. Get at least three estimates and compare them carefully. Look for licensed, bonded and insured contractors with experience in projects like yours. Ask for references and check reviews. Once you choose a pro, put everything in writing, including materials, quantities, timeline and payment schedule.

Red flags include vague estimates, unusually low bids or large upfront payment requests. If something feels off, walk away. To save money, consider bundling projects, handling basic prep work yourself, or choosing materials commonly available in your region.

Done right, hardscaping lasts for decades. With thoughtful planning and the right professional, these projects can turn your yard into a durable, usable extension of your home that works for you every day of the year.

Tweet your home care questions with #AskingAngi and we'll try to answer them in a future column.